THE CAT DANCER

'OMAHA'

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

ART OR PORN – ?
REED WALLER & KATE WORLEY
ON THE CONTROVERSIAL CAT DANCER COMIC

GENE COLAN
A DIALOGUE WITH THE DEAN OF COMICS ART!

BELGIUM'S MASTER ARTIST, HERGE, LIVES ON IN HIS WORK
ALAIN BARAN
TALKS ABOUT TINTIN, EUROPE'S TOP COMICS CHARACTER

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#59

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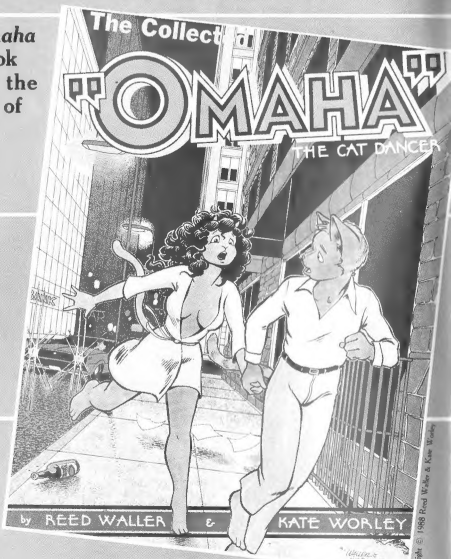

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In **Bob Ingersoll's** column in the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE — **The Law Is A Ass** — he discussed ramifications of a relatively recent (within the last three or four years) change in the RICO laws. The RICO laws deal with racketeering and are aimed at giving the government the power necessary to fight organized crime.

So what's the problem?

The problem is the recent change. Racketeering used to consist of prostitution, drug dealing, gambling, etc. (It should be noted here that I feel none of those should be illegal, either, but no one in the government seems interested in my opinion.) Now it also encompasses pornography. Any businessman who is convicted twice for any RICO offense can have *his entire business confiscated by the government.* Even if the businessman appeals his second conviction and *wins* it is too late — the government will have confiscated his business's assets and sold them at auction to cover the cost of prosecuting the businessman. *It's already been done.*

"So what?" you may ask. So this — there exists NO DEFINITION OF PORNOGRAPHY. All it takes to make something "pornographic" is for a prosecutor to make a jury believe that it is, indeed, pornographic. Consider what this means for a moment. It is *entirely* conceivable that *anything* some person in a position of governmental power finds offensive — a newspaper editorial, rock music, whatever — could be labelled pornographic and anyone who sold those items could find themselves in court facing charges based on the racketeering laws. The person in power wouldn't need to convince all that many people — and, considering some of the verdicts I've seen juries handing down lately, I can easily see a prosecutor finding a jury he could readily manipulate.

What does this all boil down to? Simply put, the government has given itself the power to totally destroy any business which sells books, magazines, newspapers, or videos that don't toe the official party line.

Does this sound far fetched? Does it sound as if I'm over reacting to a minor situation? I've said so before and I'll say so again — I certainly hope I *AM* over reacting.

But I doubt it. Governmental power exists to be *used.* Governments exist to use that power. And I believe the power granted by the RICO laws will be used — and that scares the hell out of me!

Henry

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"With OMAHA we are trying to show

REED WALLER

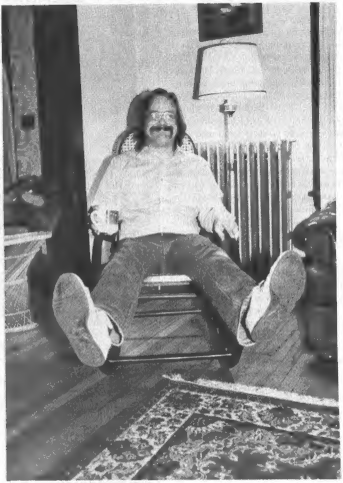

Photo: Gerl Sullivan

Reed Waller has phoned and said that he and Kate Worley will be home by the time I get there. The street in the Powderhorn neighborhood of Minneapolis is dark in front of the brick 4-plex, but on the upper porch there's light through the curtains on the doors to the studio, and there's light from the front stairway. The stormdoor is closed and the front door is open - it's spring time and warm enough. The apartment door knocks open to reveal Reed and Kate and Sasha and Roo. Old oriental carpet, dark woodwork from the nineteen-teens, dark wood from bookshelves and comfy chair & couch and coffee table (1930's), dark plastic veneer on the TV, record player and record shelves (1980's). A microphone floats from a musician's mikestand. soundlevels checked. Reed on the left in a comfy chair, Kate on the right on the couch - we're facing the coffee table that has drinks, keys, mail, calculator and Harvey Award ballots. Kate and Reed are ready with things they'd like to say, and cats Sasha and Roo agree to demure and observant, only occasionally attacking the moving pencil and demonstrating the proper way to demolish toy mice.

KEN: *What do you consider your models for animal and humans for OMAHA? Your regular pets? Are your pets your animal basis, your models for cats?*

KATE: There are our models wrestling on the floor right now. I don't know. That one should go to Reed.

REED: That's really hard to say because the thing about OMAHA was how much her own person she was from the start. Initially I did plan to have an anthropomorphic kitty cat who was a stripper and who got into all sorts of messes. I set about to design a character physically. I did a lot of research there. I was in a bar band and living with some friends in St. Paul,hanging around strip joints and drawing strippers and initially spending a lot of time at the drawing table, buying tons and tons of glamour and fashion magazines and creating looks from that. Doing real women and then start playing with their faces to get something in a kitty cat that would be representative of a fashionable kind of female beauty. I really didn't have anything specific in mind about the character. She just sort of happened.

KEN: *What was your background in drawing in terms of how you viewed doing a character. . .your basis for your cartooning style? Did you have influences or artists that you admired?*

KATE: The funny part about that's at that time I was a lot more comfortable doing

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Reed Waller
Occupation History: Funnybooks, rock guitarist/vocalist, poster artist, clerical bum, typesetter, business machine serviceman, fry cook, computer programmer
Other Interests: Folk music, science-fiction fandom
Favorite Funny Animal Comic: MARMADUKE MOUSE
Favorite Hobby: Kate Worley
Favorite Film: LADY AND THE TRAMP

that for most people sex is a part of life."

KATE WORLEY

people than I was doing funny animals. It was kind of a return for me. When I was a kid I'd spent a lot of time drawing my own funny animal comic books, and I got most of my inspiration not from other comics, even though I did collect thousands of them, but from animated cartoons, from **Disney** and **Hanna-Barbera** and Tom and Jerry and **Warner Brothers** cartoons, and these were the things I like to watch and work from. In a way it's like life-drawing, because I was watching movie scenes. I was watching animated figures. I was always interested in doing three-dimensional characters and not spending a lot of time on an illustrative style or a graphic storytelling approach. I was always just really interested in drawing characters and bring characters to life. I guess as far as comic book artists go, I really didn't put my principal attention to them.

KEN: *Was OMAHA started for a particular audience?*

REED: Yes...me. I wanted to get something going where I could feel I was expressing myself, pulling all the stops out, and that would be a vehicle for expressing a sense of fun and excitement and I really didn't have in mind that there would be any audience for it. On the contrary, I was deliberately expecting to shock people, especially the people in VOOTIE where it ran in the first place.

KEN: *What's VOOTIE?*

REED: Off-stage murmur: This guy knows perfectly well what VOOTIE is.

KEN: *Consider me willfully ignorant.*

Photo: Geri Sullivan

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kate Worley

Pre-Occupation: Will they blow up the world before I write the ultimate funnybook?

Favorite Reading: The Printed Word

Favorite Quote: "Life is *not* a dress rehearsal."

Biggest Challenge As A Writer: Keeping dialogue tight and realistic.

REED: This strange cartoonist named **Ken Fletcher** and myself got this idea of starting an apa, which is kind of a cooperative magazine,to encourage cartoonists to do funny animal comics. This was back in 1976 and we'd been talking about it for years before then. We recruited all the comic artists we could get hold of, amateurs and professionals alike. We got them to do funny animals or funny vegetables or funny machines, or anything instead of superheros. This was in the mid-70's. It's really hard to believe it now, but then funny animals were nowhere to be seen. We figured they needed some help if they were going to be resuscitated, and because of the work we'd both done on science fiction, fantasy, and stuff like that we knew that a lot more fun could be had with funny animals than had been had. We wanted to bring that back to comics, and see what would happen with adults doing funny comics for adults. So we got rolling: a cooperative magazine with people putting in some art — you were required to contribute some art every other mailing — and it would all get collated by a central mailer. Some poor slob whose responsibility it was to make sure everybody got their stuff in and that people got together and it got collated and mailed out.

"A large number of members actually

KEN: *I recall that about this time there was an underground or semi-underground magazine called QUACK — this was about the same time — is the difference between QUACK and VOOTIE explainable?*

REED: QUACK was a kind of a response to HOWARD THE DUCK. QUACK was an attempt by something resembling the mainstream comics to do something sophisticated in the funny animal area. To most of us in VOOTIE, it looked pretty bourgoise, because most of us were amateurs or underground cartoonist or people who were then or were soon to be very active in creating the mini-comic scene. Very rugged individualists. **Brad Foster. Richard Bruning. Jim Engel, Chuck Fiala. Marc Schirmeister. Greg Bear. Larry Becker. Ray Allard.** Lots of folks.

KEN: *Were all these rugged individuals suppose to be shocked then by the nature of what OMAHA was?*

REED: It divided the membership. I'm still blaming Taral **(Wayne McDonald)** for this because he was the one that sent a postcard saying something about "not enough sex in funny animal comics" and that was waving a red flag in front of me...all right, I'll take a dare. I started doing strips that were overtly sensational — they were outrageous, they contained explicit sex. Funny-animal, anthropomorphic nudity.

KEN: *As I recall it, it seemed not so much the content but that it was done visually is what surprised me at the time. I was as much shocked at my reaction at being suprised.*

KATE: You were more innocent than you knew, it what you're saying.

KEN: *It was like not visualizing what could be done until it was there and then it was perfectly obvious. I can't speak for the other people in VOOTIE and the small amateur press association, but it was intuitively obvious after I saw it. This is an approach we can take and something can be done.*

REED: It seemed to me it was just a matter of finally being prompted to do something that had been obvious all along. At least obvious to somebody with the kind of...I really don't know if I have radical sensibilities or just hyperactive gonads. I suppose it's neither here nor there.

KEN: *What size was the audience for VOOTIE?*

REED: This was just being seen by other cartoonists who were contributing.

KEN: *What do you feel their reaction was at the time?*

REED: At the time that I started doing this stuff and ultimately started doing erotic funny-animal comics that actually led to the story of **OMAHA**, the membership was pretty high. There were 60 or 70 members. It seemed to split the membership practically down the middle. There were a large number of members, over 20 I think, that actually just dropped out because they were outraged. Funny-animal comics were for kids. Or some of them were just prudes. Some of them were not grown-up in that area and were easily shocked. Some of the responses we got were really prudish. "It's not that I have anything against sex, it's just dirty, that's all."

KATE: That still seems to be the exact split you get among professional funny-animal cartoonists. We've still seen that exact split. Some of them think it's just great; some of them find it a really fresh approach. Some of them think that funny animals are for children or strictly for humor, and that adult themes, and certainly sex, should never be seen.

REED: And there are a number of them who feel that adult themes and especially sex are simply vulger and shouldn't be dealt with graphically.

KATE: You wonder how they take showers.

REED: It's a perfectly natural part of life and it should be left in the bathroom where it belongs. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *I remember that the story line didn't spring fully grown. How did the nature of the characters and the story line evolve?*

REED: It was quite different to begin with, because it started out as a satire on

Reed's note to the COMICS INTERVIEW staff: "VOOTIE strip which outraged members. Print if you dare." We couldn't resist.

He's right!
He's LYING!
THEY'RE your POWER BOSSES... TURKEYS and SHEEP!
Now just a moment here!
All that stuff about ideals might be okay if we were HUMANS...
...But we're just ANIMALS! All we understand is FUCKING and MOTHERING...
AND KILLING...
and EATING.
As long as we let sheep and turkeys tell us how to think, we'll just be Disney Critters!
That's RIGHT, Honey!
We been letting our FOOD tell us what to do!
YEAH!
RIGHT!

© 1987 Reed Waller

dropped out because they were outraged."

the closing down of the strip bars in St. Paul. In 1977 and 1978, a local politico was making a lot of noise and had managed to get new laws pushed through that made it impossible to run strip bars in town. I was annoyed by that and ran that as the theme. Omaha being your regular working girl minding her own business and trying to make a buck versus high-and-mighty political ideas . . . somebody who makes a lot of speeches over the radio and television and tries to clean up the neighborhood. Ultimately the big-mouth politician was dropped out. She wasn't needed. As it developed it got more baroque. That's probably the result of hanging around with **Jim Schumeister.** I was floundering around with the plot one afternoon when Jim who was working on LEVY'S LAW at the time, suggested that I put three strippers together in a group and call it "Charlie's Bimbos" and have them fighting for truth, justice and the American way versus the forces of prudery. That was good for a laugh. The idea of this mysterious Charles stuck in my mind anyway. It was from that joke that **Charles Tabey Sr.** was born.

KEN: *OMAHA continued for some time in VOOTIE. You got a fair number of pages accumulated as contributions. I seem to recall not only one-page stories but quite often four or five or six page stories.*

REED: I think there was about 22 pages that ran through VOOTIE, and that was a lot of the material that went into BIZARRE SEX #9. They were quite different in their order and in their form. They contained a lot of stuff that I later just cut out.

KEN: *Did accumulating the pages in sequence help you to sell the idea of a book?*

REED: Well, Denis was getting VOOTIE. Finally one day, I was looking at the chapters and realizing, "I am not going to be able to go on any further with this because I've written myself into a corner. The way I want to put this story together I'm going to have to go back and rearrange what's already happened." So, I wrote to **Denis Kitchen** and I said, "What do you think about the commercial possibilities of this?" Very shortly, I got a letter back saying, "I've been waiting for you to get ahold of me." We talked about it and worked out the deal for BIZARRE SEX #9. I got finished quickly once it had a place to go.

KEN: *You said you've gotten some negative reactions from people in the amateur press association.*

REED: Not entirely negative. For the most part the VOOTIE membership was very encouraging.

KEN: *Was direct feedback from other people valuable to how you were revising or polishing the story, or was it simply the fact that they were published?*

REED: The feedback meant a lot. The value of feedback depends on were it's coming from. Functionally VOOTIES was a writers group for cartoonists. Everybody critiqued each other's work. Of course, there were people whose opinions you valued more than other people. The people whose opinions I particularly cared about were real encouraging and had lots of comments of what was working and what wasn't and just generally being enthusiastic and supportive, and I wouldn't have had the nerve to keep doing it if I wouldn't have gotten support from somebody.

KEN: *Where did you meet Reed?*

KATE: I met Reed through the Minnesota Science Fiction Society abbreviated MNstf, which is still probably our major social circle. We were both married to other people at the time. Reed was a long-time member of the group, and I just cropped up about ten years ago. Then he went out of town about six months after I joined and vanished from the scene for a few years. He came back and at that time I was working with my husband on a science fiction radio show for local community radio called SHOCKWAVE, and it was both adaptation of stories and original works and a lot of comedy. I think that we had met a couple of times socially, but the first time we started getting to know each other at all was at a taping of an adaptation of a short story, and we were playing characters opposite each other, and it kind of sparked our interest in each other, because we both had a theatre background and we both did radio. Ultimately we started getting into more conversations at parties — we were both musicians and we

You all GIVIN' UP the phony humanity scene?
YOU BET, Sister! Join us?
SHIT, YEAH! Humanity ain't no loss to ME!
...so when are you GUYS gonna get with it?
HUH?
Take OFF all that HUMAN shit, hey!
WHAT!
COME ON! Quit acting like a MAN!
We're gonna FUCK and FEAST and FORGET we EVER KNEW all that Disney shit!
Makes me horny just thinkin' about all those juicy li'l bunny rabbits!
At last we're FREE of OPPRESSION! We can be OURSELVES and NO ONE can STOP US!
FASCIST
BELL-OUT
FUNNIES
FEATURING! DONNIE & MARIE DOG

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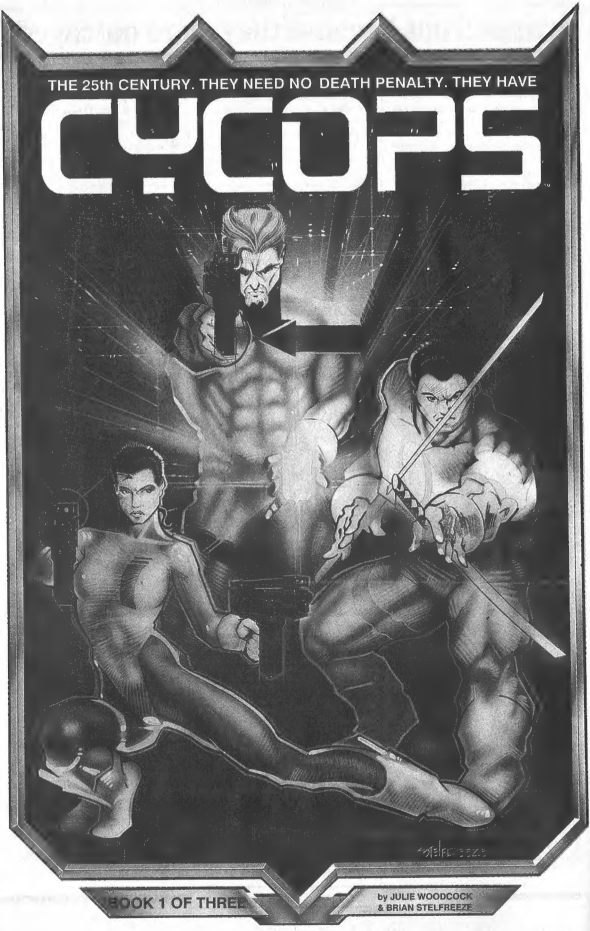
THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE
CYCOPS
BOOK 1 OF THREE
by JULIE WOODCOCK
& BRIAN STELFREEZE

"Denis Kitchen really deserves sainthood."

© 1987 Reed Waller

started saying wouldn't it be nice to do some music together. By that time, we were both getting a divorce. Then we started doing music together and that was kind of it. After our respective breakups we moved in together. At that time, Reed was working on what was to become OMAHA #1 for Steel Dragon Press. He finished that and his health was finished at the same time. We were both working day jobs; we were doing a little bit of music. That's where it sat for about a year and a half. He started on what was to become OMAHA #2 and got blocked. Finally I looked at those pages and asked "Are you ever going to do anything with this again?" He said, "Gee, I don't know. I don't quite know where I want to go with the story." I said, "You can go this way, or that way, or do this, or do that." I just babbled for about a half an hour. He looked at me and said "Would you like a job?" and that's how I began to write it. Initially, I just roughed out plot ideas, about five pages. After that I started contributing some dialogue. By the end of OMAHA #2, I was writing the whole thing, including scene descriptions and thumbnail sketches, that sort of thing. We did that one for SteelDragon.

The next year, we were trying to decide if we wanted to continue with SteelDragon or go on to try and do something else. Because there had been a hiatus of several years — three or four years I believe - between BIZARRE SEX #9 and OMAHA #1. Instead of interest dying away, amazing interest seemed to have grown during that time. New and exciting things were happening in comics. Comics were growing up. BIZARRE SEX #9 was kind of alone. When OMAHA #1 came out, I think people were more ready for it. We went to the local comic convention in St. Paul and I met **Denis Kitchen** for the first time. Within a few weeks after that, we were talking to a number of people about the possibility of continuing with Omaha and trying to decide who to continue with, and ended up going with **Denis Kitchen** who supported the original book. He seemed the best person to do it. He still seems the best person to do it. It's very nice to have a publisher you feel backs you up. He really deserves sainthood for putting up with us, because we are not the easiest to be with. We are the most disorganized people in the business today. People ask us about our working methods and we laugh at them a lot, because method is about the last word I'd use. But we seem to keep putting the book out.

But that's how I fell into it. I had a scriptwriting background, and for anyone who is thinking about getting into comics, that is probably the best way. Learn screenplay writing, or better yet radio scriptwriting, because what you need to do is learn to be a master of dialogue without talking about, expounding on what is being seen, because the artist will take care of that for you. That is what he or she is there for.

A leaf from Reed's sketchbook, illustrating the development of sexy kitty.

KEN: *Does that mean that you do the standard script thing of visualizing scenes when you're writing them?*

KATE: Oh yes. After the first three or four issues we did together, it seemed either we were getting that familiar with each other or I am expressing myself better, because what I see when I visualize it and what Reed ultimately draws are very, very close; and we do not talk a great deal about the work in between its being written and being drawn. I occasionally look at pencils if I am very concerned that a certain panel come off a certain way. I very occasionally have Reed change something. But very rarely really. I write a page; I hand it to Reed; he takes it and goes into the studio. We don't really discuss it, but I am getting very much what I visualize. I do set a scene; I write a scene description in greater or lesser detail. Something we have been discussing that would be nice is to work with a polariod and take a series of 70 or so shots of hand gestures, and then I can say, "do a Number 42." I don't know how other writer/artist teams work. I know some of them are more formalized then we are. We do have the advantage of living here if one of us desperately needs the other one's counsel, but we don't seek it often. We manage to keep our functions quite separate.

KEIF
LLAMA
XENO-TECH
BY MATT HOWARTH
BUT TO ME, BOB DYLAN IS SPACE MUSIC.
FOLLOW THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES OF MATT HOWARTH'S SPACE-FARING HEROINE IN THE MONTHLY KEIF LLAMA, XENO-TECH!
PREMIERING IN JUNE AT ALL FIRST-CLASS COMICS SHOPS!
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"That was very unnerving for him initially."

© 1997 Reed Waller

KEN: *Do you do thumbnail sketches?*

KATE: I do little diagrams with letters once in a while. And I will try to do it more in the future because it's very useful. I will actually do more thumbnails.

KEN: *So what you do is more like a shooting script with blocking diagrams?*

KATE: Yes, we do use a lot of camera terms as far as how close or how far a shot is, or from what angle. Yes it much more resembles a screenplay than anything else.

KEN: *You look at pencils in terms of what you want?*

KATE: Once in a while. At times when I have been working a day job, generally I don't get the opportunity. Rather than a completed script, then the pencils, then the inks, which is how a lot of people do it, we are generally going through the complete process page-by-page or at the most scene-by-scene, so a lot of the time I haven't even had the opportunity to look at pencils.

REED: I'd be better about that except that my pencils are so bad that generally I am too embarrassed to even let her see them.

KATE: I wouldn't say they're bad. I'd say they're more fully realized than they used to be.

KEN: *You mean your pencils are tentative?*

REED: Yes. My pencils tend to be pretty messy, and I will very often do a full page of pencils, and they'll be one big gloppy mess of gray, of which only I could conceivably distinguish which were the lines that were finally to be inked over — and then at the last minute when I'm down there with the brush, I'll actually free-hand-ink something quite different from anything that's been pencilled.

KATE: So mostly I have to trust him. Once in a rare while, I have said no, that something won't do after it has been completed. Most of the time I will say that it's different, but it's better than what I visualized. But like I said more and more often it's just what I wanted. We do a lot of work on a very unspoken basis. We see a lot of things the same way, which is why I think Reed trusted me with his characters in the first place. I know that that was very unnerving for him initially. These were his characters; they were his kids; was I going to do right by him?

REED: I was very proprietary. I had to give them up in stages. I "let" her write plot outlines and then I "let" her do scene breakdowns; and then I "let" her start writing dialogue, and so on. It was hard for me to give it up. I couldn't do it all at once. *(Laughs)*

KATE: I think it took a whole week. About that long. But since then there are characters I have created and I'd feel as weird about that if somebody else were to take it on.

KEN: *I have heard this cliche' before, but do you think of your characters as having a life of their own? Are they writing their own dialogue or their own situations at this point?*

KATE: Yes, I think that this is so. Some people are able to write far in advance. But we frequently found as we are pursuing the story line that something comes up out of the way a particular character handles a particular situation. We finally want to develop the character more or pursue this line more. Many of the characters do grow on their own. I have never really sat down to deliberately invent a character; there has been a place for them already; we needed to have this kind of person to fill this role and they come. The characters tend to draw themselves, and they also tend to expand their parts beyond what they initially might have been. Huddle is a very good case in point, he started out as the guy who saved Shelley's life following the incident in Charlie's night club. Then we found out that he was Charlie's nurse. Since then on he has gone

ONCE UPON A TIME: THREE LOW-LIFE MUTANTS AND A BIRD OF QUESTIONABLE ORIGINS HELPED A YOUNG MAN CONQUER AN EMPIRE.

THEY FOUGHT OFF ONE-EYED CATS, TRIBES OF BUSHITO-ACS, IMPERIAL SQUADRONS, AND THE EVIL LORD GEKKUS ONLY TO COME FACE-TO-FACE WITH

THE CURSE OF THE BLOATED TOAD!

FROM THE PAGES OF **THREAT!** COMES THE MOST UNLIKELY TRIO TO EVER SAVE THE UNIVERSE. THEY'RE NUTTY. THEY'RE WACKY. YA GOTTA LOVE 'EM:

The HOLO Brothers

CATCH THEIR ACT!
by Jim Rohn
from
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"We had someone throw up in OMAHA."

© 1993 Reed Waller

on to be one of the family. He has become Shelley's lover and a close friend of Chuck and Omaha. When we first put him in we could not have predicted exactly how far his character would go. Rob is another character who seems to be growing because his personality throws light on different subjects. Now if they would only tell me what they were going to do, I could be a lot more intelligent when AMAZING HEROES PREVIEW calls

KEN: *How as your move into the comics industry, Steel Dragon Press, Denis Kitchen? What was that like?*

KATE: Abrupt. We got into comics fast. We knew there was going to be this small convention in St. Paul. I suggested that we go, more and more strongly as it got closer. Reed resisted the idea-why, I can't exactly remember. Reed had been living a reclusive life for a while. His health had been bad. I insisted we go; we went and we had an absolutely delightful time. What I think really astonished both of us was it was the first opportunity we had to meet people outside of our own relatively small circle of friends who read OMAHA, who followed and cared about the book. From there we decided to go to the Chicago comics convention, which is a much larger convention. That was a very overwhelming experience. We did an autographing at **Kitchen's** table and were almost mobbed. We couldn't believe how many people there were.

REED: I was kind of stupified. I didn't have any idea that anyone read the damn thing. As far as I knew OMAHA was an obscure small press comic of some critical success and no particular significance. Maybe years from now it would be something to collectors. The idea that we had any popularity was pretty novel.

KATE: It was pretty staggering. Such nice people. We have probably the nicest, brighest, and certainly most articulate fans of any people working in comics today The letters we get are astonishing. They tend to be from older people, for one thing we tend to have an older audience than an awful lot of comics; people from our generation, people in their late 20's or 30's or older. The write incredibly articulate and sensitive letters. They care about the kinds of things that we care about. They get very involved and care very much about our characters. When we have met them in person, it does tend to be a very pleasant experience because they turn out to be people a lot like us who have a wide range of experience and a wide circle of friends. They know that life and relationships are complicated things, and that's what we deal with in OMAHA. People

REED WALLER'S "OMAHA" THE CAT DANCER "FEEDS the NEEDY"
COMING KAMPUS CO-ED 1982 by REED WALLER
HAND OVER THE PURSE, LADY— AND NO FUNNY STUFF...
NOT ANOTHER MUGGER!
SAY, THAT'S ONE UGLY LOOKING TOOTH YOU GOT THERE...
...WHAT'RE YOU, A DENTIST? IF YOU'RE A DENTIST, YOU'RE DEAD!
GET YOUR HAND OFF THAT SPRAY CAN, SISTER!
SILLY! THIS ISN'T A SPRAY CAN.
IT'S A YUMMY CREAM-FILLED HOTZISS TWONKIE
GAK! GET THAT SUGARY JUNK OUT OF MY FACE
LINT
...AND IT'S ALL YOURS!
GULP!
OOOWWW!! ...MY TOOTH! MOW~WHIMPER!
ANOTHER VICTORY FOR JUNK FOOD KUNG FU!
Hotziss® Twonkies™
"An Oral Blight in Every Bite"

tend to focus on sexual aspects in OMAHA, but what we are trying to do with the sexual aspect of OMAHA is show that, at least we would like to think, for most people sex is a part of life

REED: I hear a lot of "Why do you put the sex in?" Well, why do you put the fist fights in and why do you put the shoutitg matches and car chases in, why can't you just have that happen off stage? It's not necessary in drama, we don't think, for all the peak moments to be bad ones. Everything significant isn't always bad. There are highs. We see life as being a big complicated mess of both highs and lows. That's the way we like it. If it doesn't seem to go anywhere... I've heard criticisms of OMAHA that it rambles on and doesn't seem to go anywhere. But life is like that.

KATE: You tell me what the plot is in your daily life and I'll tell you where the plot is in our book. We had someone throw up in OMAHA and we never had anyone say that that was perverse or unnatural to show. We did it because it was the obvious thing to have happen. Yes, we are doing it to make a point and no, we're not. The fact that it has seemed to have started, or is contributing to, something that has been happening in comics in general and funny-animal comics in particular — it may be cause-and-effect or it simply may be that not only have comics grown up but the cartoonists have grown up, and some of them have hit puberty.

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"Truth is as dull and hackneyed as fiction."

That really is not meant to badmouth them.

KEN: *In terms of both your audience and what you portray, do you think it makes a difference that you have a black-and-white comics market for squareback or paperback collections?*

KATE: Yes, I do. No two stories are from the same comic book. We got very tired to giving people the exact bibliography of which stories were where. The first collection — BIZARRE SEX #9, OMAHA #1 and #2, and all the short stories — was a very good introduction to OMAHA for a lot of people. It was a good format for OMAHA. That may have made a difference. I don't know if it has made a difference to help sell our book or that it turned people on to the idea of treating things more as they would treat other kinds of literature. Certainly there are some gorgeous things that I would call literature being done in comics today. Some of them done in the graphic novel format, some of them in collections. And ultimately being done in novel format. The work of the **Herandez Brothers** comes immediately to mind. LOVE AND ROCKETS is as good as anything being written anywhere for my money.

KEN: *What current artists or writers do you like?*

KATE: We don't buy comics. This may come as a shock to a lot of people, but many people in the business don't buy many comics because they simply cannot afford to. It is not a good field in which to get rich, but there are people who we go out of our way to see that we get their stuff. **Larry Marder**'s TALES OF THE BEANWORLD is incredible. This man has created a universe beyond compare. We can always read **R. Crumb.** He still continues to grow. Anything **Alan Moore** writes I will read gladly any time.

REED: A lot of our reading is from the undergrounds. . . **Ted Richards** and **Larry Welz,** and **Gilbert Shelton, Dan O'Neill. Howard Cruse.** And independents. Usagi Yojimbo. Micra. Dreamery. Critters.

KEN: *Do current comics and writing have impact on what you're doing? Do you get feedback from what you see, what you hear in the comics field and in general too?*

KATE: There are things that we pick up from, I think, all over. I couldn't cite specific instances. There are things that I think "Wow! That's incredible!" that someone else is doing that I can't conceive of doing. Like I said I think that what Marder is doing is incredible. I can't imagine doing it. We read a lot, watch tv and movies, and probably stuff that's written all over. I would say our general reading comes into it more than anything else. We read largely non-fiction and classics.

REED: I doubt that, whether we enjoy it or not, what goes on in other comic books has a lot to do with what we do.

KATE: People have also asked if I deliberately pick current events to follow up. I've recently had a character who is a rather right-wing politico, who is trying to manipulate the political climate to the right for his own gain. Some people asked if I based it on what was happening in the real world. What they may not realize is that the books are written considerably ahead of their publication. Often I have written something like this just ahead of some scandal breaking. I didn't do it on purpose, I stuck with the story line I started over a year ago. It's not my fault that some evangelist has gotten caught with their hands in the cookie jar or something else since.

REED: I think it just goes to prove that truth is just as dull and hackneyed as fiction.

KEN: *Speaking of non-fiction, do you actively research a story like in Omaha? (Laughter.)*

KATE: Innocently, very innocently. No, in a recent interview of course one of the three quotes the guy picked was where I said that was goes in Omaha is fairly tame compared to what goes on in our circle of friends. I have been getting ribbed a lot for that, which was a stupid thing to say, but no more than true. In our circle of friends — and we have just been to our big science fiction convention — there are over two hundred people who are at least fairly close acquaintances. People who have known each other for a long period of time — ten years or better — are likely to have a history of complicated interrelationships. No, we do not base things on this or that experience or this or that relationship. Probably it's drawn on similar things that we can imagine happening.

REED: Even if we wanted to, who could remember who did what to who after all this time, anyway?

KATE: I like to joke that when we are all eighty years old we will all go tottering up to each other and say, "Weren't we married once?" That's too true.

KEN: *I was just thinking about folding wheelchairs.*

KATE: That is not based on anyone we

© 1987 Reed Waller

"We're trying to tackle the things nobody

SO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GEORGE FINDS OUT JOANNE'S HERE?
I DON'T KNOW- WE ALL GOT KILLED, I GUESS.
YOU DON'T SOUND TOO CONCERNED.
RIGHT NOW, I'M ABOUT CONCERNED OUT.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
I DO. GO TO BED AND FUCK.

know. Although the thing about not being able to fly a wheelchair battery is based on an experience a friend had. Very little is drawn from real life. It does irritate me sometimes when people say what makes Omaha different is the sexual content. I say show me another character in comics in a wheelchair who is having to cope — not who is brave and noble and who's a superhero — just a guy who's dealing with the everyday shit of having to live in a wheelchair and having to adjust to that. That is something that I had done a little research on - not as much as I should have done, but we do try to make that realistic.

REED: It makes people kind of testy.

KATE: People get testy. People get frustrated.

KEN: *Probably good that you have the sexual content to shock people so they won't notice the other stuff subconsciously.*

KATE: We are filtering some things through. When we introduced our first male homosexual sex scene, I had hoped for a certain response from our readership, many of whom are straight young men, to stop and think if this bothered them, why it did so. And we indeed got some letters to that effect. Like, "When I first saw this it upset me, it disgusted me, or it was weird but then I realized I hadn't been upset by the heterosexual scenes, or the lesbian sex scenes. Why did this bother me, and funny, this doesn't bother me now." We are educating in the context that this is the real world. Some people want us to educate more directly; they want us to deal with more important issues like AIDS or birth control. Yes, we will deal with things if they come up, but it isn't our job to be an educational comic. We are up to entertaining; we are dealing with some things that do not get dealt with anywhere in comics. There are people devoting entire comic books to AIDS education, but I haven't seen one devoted to the recovery of someone adjusting to life in a wheelchair, and what they have to deal with and the difficulties they have dealing with their sexuality.

REED: Or the difficulties of dealing with a loved one with a severe mental disorder, like a bi-polar disorder, like Charlie.

KATE: I wish we had developed that fur-

YOU SAID YOU HAD A WEIRD THOUGHT...?
MM-HMM.
OOOH...
MAYBE I'M SICK... BUT IT TURNS ME ON...
YEAH?
... THAT YOU'RE SCREWING ME IN HER BED.
YOU'RE SICK.

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will touch because they're real life."

ther in the book. We are trying to tackle the things nobody will touch because they're indeed also part of real life. We mentioned just tangentially for instance, some people got upset because they thought we were being flippant when Chuck asked Rob is his lover had died of AIDS or the rather testy reply of Rob, but that's certainly not the only thing that homosexuals or anyone else dies of, so I put it that his lover had died in a car crash, something that happens to many many people in this country and which very often could have been prevented. My first husband died in a car crash. That's a hell of a lot more likely way for somebody to go. We contributed to STRIP AIDS. We did a tiny bit of educating. We have other things to say, too. Sex, that would all be fine if sex was the only point but it's not.

KEN: *I've heard you say that you're pleasantly surprised at the number of women that read the comic.*

KATE: More all the time. We always knew we had women readers but lately our mail is running almost fifty-fifty men and women, and a tremendous number seem to be picking up the book, more all the time.

REED: In the comment you make about a lot of your readers being in their late twenties-early thirties, and the number of women, how are they finding out about the comic?

KATE: Darned if I know. Word of mouth to a large degree. A lot of people in the business tend to think of it as quite successful because they've all seen it. But people don't realize that it's a book that has grown very, very gradually. We are now running about 15,000 on our first printrun. They are getting reprinted and the ultimate print run of BIZARRE SEX #9 is 60,000 but it is not a big-press book. When we tell them that we are not making a lot of money at it, they're surprised until we explain that, no, this is a book that has averaged 10,000-15,000 circulation. I don't know how people get it. They must get it on street corners. Word of mouth is the most frequent thing and I think mainly among women. At MINICON, the Minnesota Science Fiction Society convention, which we just got through this week-end, I was approached by several people who said, "Somebody handed me this and said I had to read it and then I went and bought them all." We have literally seen that happen at a comics convention where somebody picked up one issue, leafed through it and bought the entire run.

REED: "If you like General Hospital you'll love..."

KATE: I think that's something that does appeal to the women readers. The pocket phrase we use to describe OMAHA is "an adult funny-animal soap opera." I don't find soap opera a pejorative term at all. It's what our parents used to call a serial on television or in the movies. It's an on-going story with on-going characters and on-going plot lines. But I think women like that. They like being able to get to know a character and see them go through changes. I'm actually, at this point, more surprised that we're keeping and acquiring new male readers all the time.

REED: It's the men who tend to balk at it: "I like a story with a beginning and a middle and an end."

KATE: Whereas women like the on-going relationship that can develop with the characters. Women like to see what will happen next. Not that men don't, half to two-thirds of our readers are men. The readership among women continues to grow and there are not that many comic books out that have appeal for women. We have not only strong women characters but strong *everyday* women characters who are not superheros, who have to worry about what to wear, what they look like, how they're getting along with their old man. Some people think our characters are too mundane and too concerned with the everyday. But, we are, personally. Life does still require getting up every day and dealing with that day and then going on with the next one. That is what I think we are presenting in OMAHA in a fairly good way. It's very difficult to get both the sense of the everyday and keep the dramatic tension going. That is the biggest challenge I have in my job, because I want both of those aspects to be there. It's the story of people being caught up in things bigger than themselves, she says in a pretentious voice.

KEN: *So what's this about an OMAHA album?*

KATE: Currently we have a rock and roll band. We've had one for about the last year and a half. We're both songwriters and we know a lot of songwriters. Denis came to us with the idea of doing an OMAHA picture disk, which is basically

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LAURENCE P. KAMP

covers by
JAIME HERNANDEZ
LEE BINSWANGER

"Currently we have a rock and roll band."

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an LP with artwork laminated on it. In this case, of course, the artwork will be Omaha and the album will contain several songs about Omaha or about Omaha's universe. Part of where the idea came from was, one thing I thought real appropriate to have Omaha do with her dancing was to do a rock video. So this was when we put a rock and roll band in the strip. Actually, I think we had already put a rock and roll band in the strip. They were musician friends. The Herd is the name of their band. It is not the name of our band. We'd give the name of our band but we don't know what it is right now.

REED: We're in between band names.

KATE: I'm writing the song that she will do the video on, which will be included as a piece of the book, and we will then be doing a full LP of original music by us and our friends, a large part of which will be tied in with the comic book. We hope to have it out by this summer.

KEN: *The both of you have been doing music for years, haven't you?*

REED: I've been doing that more than I've been doing art. Most of my life. I've been in rock and roll and in pop and folk music since 1963 and a professional guitarist and vocalist since 1965. There was a long time that I wasn't doing art. In the sixties, I was playing in rock and roll bands and I didn't get back into comics until VOOTIE. Before then I had just been doing poster art, and music had been most of my life. The drummer we're working with right now is the guy I was in my first band with when I was 17 years old. It's old-home week.

KATE: The bass player's also an old friend. So, we're very happy with the band we're got. Music and comics are a strong tie and there are, of course, some very good musicians in comics. **Crumb** is a very good musician. **Mark Bode** is a piano player. **Ty Templeton** has a band.

REED: Bob Armstrong.

KATE: Yes, a lot of people . . . so it's a very common cross-over. Right now it's kind of going through a fad stage. We're happy to be going ahead and doing it because we are very solid professional musicians and we think we can produce not only something with a comic book tie-in, but something that is good solid music. It will be fun. Let people see another side of us.

KEN: *Are there ties between you both being rock musicians and being cartoonists or writers? Is it the same sort of respect? Are there parallels?*

REED: Respect?!?

KATE: That's a term in the music business you don't use at all. Everything is more complicated than you think it will be. Yes, I think there are some parallels but mostly I'd say they're both fun ways to almost make a living. If you're very, very good and very, very lucky at both you can make a good living. We're just good enough and just lucky enough to be making almost a living with both of us.

REED: Rock music has the additional charm of every time you turn around it costs $500 or $1,000.

KATE: Yes, cartooning is less expensive to do, at least at the moment.

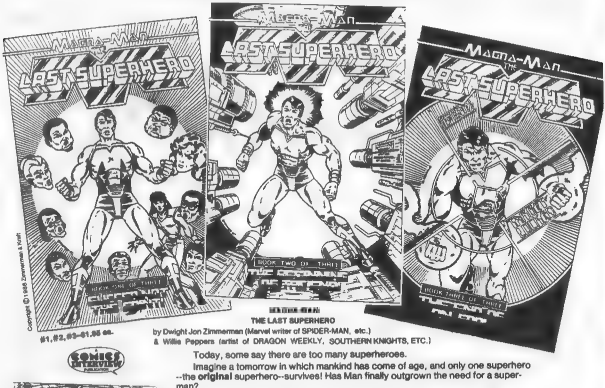
KEN: *We should wrap up here. Is there anything you'd like to say directly to OMAHA fans?*

KATE: One handy tip for fans, if you want to make me happy at autographings, take your books out of the bags. That's my only complaint about fame and fortune. I hope to get better and better. I enjoy it, there's nothing I've every found in my life that's more fun.

REED: I've wanted to draw comic books since I was two years old and I'm not going to start complaining about what a tough profession it is now.

Photo: Geri Sullivan

"I hate talented newcomers!"–GEORGE PEREZ, after admiring WILLIE PEPPERS' incredibly detailed pencil art.



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THE LAST SUPERHERO
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& Willie Peppers (artist of DRAGON WEEKLY, SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, ETC.)

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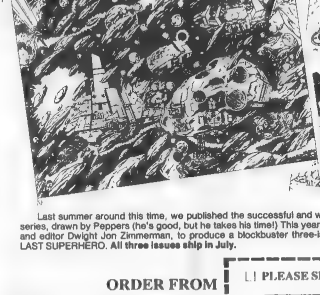

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"I had been doing HOWARD THE DUCK."

GENE COLAN

If you are a comics fan, then you know of Gene Colan. What you may not know is that, since 1944, hardly a month has gone by without Gene's art appearing in a new comic book. He started out on WINGS COMICS for Fiction House and went on to a plethora of companies: Timely, DC, Ziff-Davis, EC, Dell, Ace, Quality, Charlton, and St. John. And over the past thirty years, while many of his contemporaries were dropping by the wayside of getting into different fields, Gene Colan kept refining his art and becoming one of the greatest super-hero and horror artists of the Second Heroic Age. In the mid-Sixties he broke loose at Marvel with the definitive versions of Daredevil, Iron Man and Sub-Mariner, and at Warren with nightmarish horror-visions and gritty war-stories in wash tones. By the Seventies he had moved to one of his supreme achievements, TOMB OF DRACULA, making it (with writer Marv Wolfman and inker Tom Palmer) the longest consecutively-running horror series of the decade, and probably the greatest. At the same time, he gave reality to the off-the-wall visions of Steve Gerber in the acclaimed Marvel humor book, HOWARD THE DUCK. Twice he gave Dr. Strange the most distinctive art-work since Steve Ditko, limning some of Roy Thomas' and Steve Englehart's best scripts. In the late Seventies he was responsible for two of Eclipse Comics' earliest projects, STEWART THE RAT with Gerber and RAGAMUFFINS with Don McGregor. When a disagreement with Jim Shooter spurred him to end his long-standing association with Marvel, Gene turned to DC and provided a stunning BATMAN, as well as NIGHT FORCE with Wolfman, NATHANIEL DUSK with McGregor, and JEMM, SON OF SATURN with Greg Potter. His current projects include SILVERBLADE with Cary Bates for DC and the new DETECTIVES, INC. series for Eclipse.

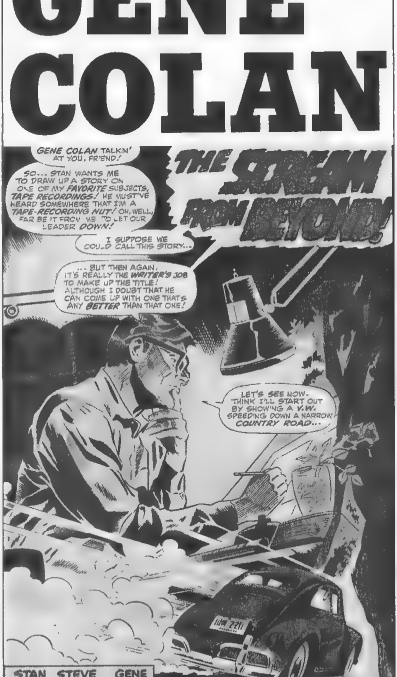
So why hasn't anybody that I know of ever done an interview with him?

I dunno . . . I guess they were just waiting for me to do it. I found Gene a gracious fellow in person, when I met him at the Dallas Fantasy Fair, and in this phone conversation which follows. I think you will, too. Roll the tape, boys . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *I wonder if you could take me back to 1957 and tell me the story that I've heard about the phone booth and the lost dime.*

GENE COLAN: Oh! Where did you hear that?

LOU: *I heard that from Cat Yronwode. I thought it was a great story, one of the most inspirational ones I've heard in this whole business.*


GENE COLAN TALKIN' AT YOU, FRIEND!
SO... STAN WANTS ME TO DRAW UP A STORY ON ONE OF MY FAVORITE SUBJECTS, TAPE RECORDINGS! HE MUST'VE HEARD SOMEWHERE THAT I'M A TAPE-RECORDING NUT! OH, WELL! FAR BE IT FROM ME TO LET OUR LEADER DOWN!
I SUPPOSE WE COULD CALL THIS STORY...
THE SCREAM FROM BEYOND!
...BUT THEN AGAIN, IT'S REALLY THE WRITER'S JOB TO MAKE UP THE TITLE! ALTHOUGH I DOUBT THAT HE CAN COME UP WITH ONE THAT'S ANY BETTER THAN THAT ONE!
LET'S SEE NOW... THINK I'LL START OUT BY SHOWING A V.W. SPEEDING DOWN A NARROW COUNTRY ROAD...
STAN LEE WRITER
STEVE SKEATES EDITOR
GENE COLAN ARTIST
DAN ADKINS, INKER
SAM ROSEN, LETTERER

© 1970 Marvel Comics Group

"That's right. The bottom dropped out

BUT AT THAT MOMENT, AS IF SOMEHOW WASN'T GOING ON ALREADY...
KRAKK!
THAT NEVER, IT CAN ONLY BE—THE BOTTOM OF EVERYTHING!
THAT MEANS—EVERYTHING DISAPPEARS!
KRAKK!
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE!
I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE PHONE BOOTH!
BUT—I LEFT THE DIME OUT AWAY!

The Colan trademark of cinematic motion is evident in these Silver Age DAREDEVIL panels.

GENE: *(Laughter.)* Well, I've been interested in Christian Science for quite awhile, and that's what happened. I was in the process of studying it and practicing it, and I went into a phone booth to make a call and my dime wasn't returned to me.

LOU: *And this was at a time when —*

GENE: It was at a time when business was pretty bad, very few people could get any work. Marvel was being done by **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby,** essentially they were running the entire affair.

LOU: *As I recall — not meaning to step on your toes there — that was the year in which they lost their distributor, Atlas, and they lost on almost all of their books and had to just chop it down to a bare minimum.*

GENE: That's right. The bottom dropped out for a lot of people, myself included, and I was in the process of trying to relocate. I quickly found out that there was nothing available in comics so I picked up some advertising free-lance. Eventually through Science I was able to find another position which kept me going for quite a few years. The phone booth incident was just an example, a demonstration, which is what anyone studying Science and a whole new method of looking at life . . . *all* students are asked to practice the religion. So here was an opportunity for me to practice a very simple law, that anything that man owns he owns; he's never lost anything, and if it's been given to him by God it's rightfully his, he'll get it back. That was the premise I was working on. I went into the phone booth, forgetting momentarily about Science, trying to make a call — we couldn't consummate the call and I hung up with some frustration, and the dime wasn't returned! I was really quite annoyed. I pounded on the phone, nothing happened, and so I just walked out of the booth out into the street. When I got out into the street I said to myself, "What am I doing? I have an opportunity here to make a demonstration, I should go back into that phone booth and make it." And I didn't know what in the world to do. So I went back in, and I was thinking, "I was in here and nothing happened, what makes me think that something's going to happen now?" But when I sat down and faced the phone the simple truth came to me that the dime is yours and you have a right to it. It's not the dime it's the demonstration that I was trying to perform here, and I just *stared* at this phone. I didn't know what in the world to expect, some kind of a miracle? And I looked up and there was this button that I'd just never noticed before: Coin Return. I pressed the button and down came the dime. To me that was a perfect demonstration.

LOU: *That sounds like a darn good demonstration to me. It kind of makes me wish that Jack Kirby was a Christian Scientist.* (Laughter.)

GENE: Well, here's one simple fact: God's law is always in operation. You've got to tune into it. It's always running and it's always there, but most people don't really turn to God in a situation. They use God as a last resort, very seldom as a first. I think we're all pretty much guilty of that. I do believe, though — by just making a declaration of the fact that his law is in operation, and that what we all own we own — I do think that eventually Jack will get all of his work back.

LOU: *Well, having set the stage on that incident, let's go back to the origin of Gene Colan. Gene, for somebody that's*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gene Colan
Occupation: Artist
Born: 1926 in New York
Wife: Adrienne — she's the backbone of my success, put that in
Children: Two, a girl (23) and a boy (21); he's currently in Israel and she works for BBD&O
Favorite Movies: IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (I relate to it in every way); TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD; anything that Gary Cooper ever made
Favorite Writer Has Worked With: Greg Potter, a new writer at DC. He's something else, he writes so beautifully.
Favorite Series Ever Worked On: DRACULA, that's the best
Credits: TOMB OF DRACULA, DAREDEVIL, HOWARD THE DUCK, SILVERBLADE, BATMAN, WONDER WOMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, CAPTAIN MARVEL (Marvel version), IRON MAN, RAGAMUFFINS, DETECTIVE, INC., STEWART THE RAT, AVENGERS, JEMM SON OF SATURN, horror stories for Warren and Marvel, war stories for DC, etc., etc., etc.

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for a lot of people, myself included."

been doing work in comics for so long — and I can't think of anybody besides you and Jack Kirby and Curt Swan who have been in comics continuously for maybe the past 40 years almost without any letup — we know very little about you. So can we get some information on your pre-comics history?

GENE: Well, I was in the Air Force just shortly after they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and I was sent over to the Philippines in the occupation forces. Prior to entering into the Air Force I did a short stint at Fiction House in New York.

LOU: *Your first job as a comics artist was at Fiction House, 1944 or '45. What was your first drawing? Was it one of those WINGS COMICS things?*

GENE: I don't remember. They threw everything at me, Westerns, romance, whatever they had. It was just a summer job really.

LOU: *You were a warm body and they threw the stuff at you.*

GENE: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* And I met some people, you know. I met **George Tuska** there, he had been in comics for quite a number of years prior to that so I really met a pro. I never met **Jack Kirby** until years later, but I met George and one or two other people.

LOU: *Murphy Anderson?*

GENE: Murphy Anderson was working there and we were both sort of on the same level, we had just started. I *think* Murphy had just started at that time, I'm not sure though. You know, you say to me there's very few of us left, I wonder what's happened to all of these people.

LOU: *I don't know. A few are still here, you know, but most of them either retired or something like that. The only ones I can think of who have been around as long as you are Curt Swan and Jack Kirby. Gene, what made you want to do comics in the first place?*

GENE: Well, I'm a great lover of film. To go to movies to me was the biggest treat in the world as a kid, especially the Warner Brothers films because I found them very dramatic. As I think back, in most of the Warner Brothers films usually the stories took place in the rain. *(Laughter.)* There was always a thunderstorm or wet pavements or something to emphasize or amplify the drama.

LOU: *That reminds me of about half a dozen pages from DAREDEVIL in the 1960s where you'd have night scenes and DD would be out there in the rain and all that kind of stuff.*

GENE: Yeah, as much atmosphere as I could absorb I tried to put into my stories, because it's all atmospheric. And that's really how it started. When I was about 13 or 11 or 10, around in there, I used to entertain myself a lot with doing the little comic drawings at home. Not cartoon drawings, but I would make up my own stories. The very first thing that ever came out of my head was a spy story that I just did for myself, I entertained *myself* with it. I called the character Jim Turner, American Spy, and I would put him in adventures that I myself would have loved to have been in, and pretended that I was watching this thing on the screen. That was the way I entertained myself, to me it was all entertainment, and that's how it all began.

LOU: *So Fiction House, when you were there in 1944, the editor was Thurman Scott, right?*

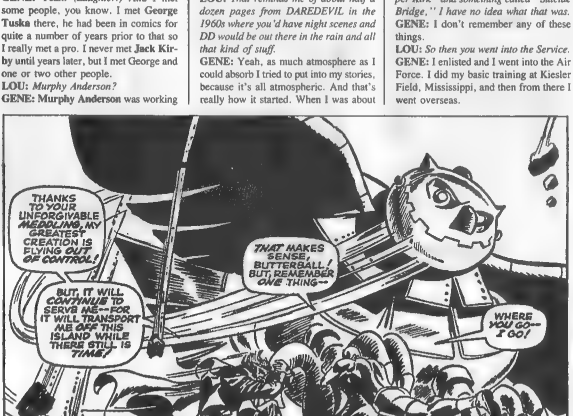
GENE: I don't remember the name of the editor and your telling me **Thurman Scott** does not ring a bell. I think it was a **Mr. Burns.**

LOU: *Could be. In Jerry Bails' directory it says you did WINGS COMICS, "Clipper Kirk" and something called "Suicide Bridge," I have no idea what that was.*

GENE: I don't remember any of these things.

LOU: *So then you went into the Service.*

GENE: I enlisted and I went into the Air Force. I did my basic training at Kiesler Field, Mississippi, and then from there I went overseas.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THAT MAKES SENSE, BUTTERBALL! BUT, REMEMBER ONE THING—
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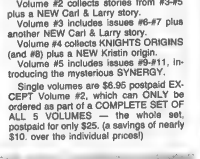

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"I walked in with this pathetic art work."

LOU: *Were you ever on Wake Island?*

GENE: No. I went to the Philippines though, right outside of Manilla.

LOU: *The reason I ask, of course, is because of the EC story that you did.*

GENE: That was a story . . . I didn't know what I was going to get from **Harvey Kurtzman** but I wanted to be associated with them. I admured everyone that worked up there, *everybody!* Some of the finest storytelling and artwork had come out of EC. So I had my chance, Harvey gave me an opportunity to do that story.

LOU: *What did you do after you left the Air Force?*

GENE: Well, when I got out of the Service I tried to get my job back again with Fiction House, sent them letters to no avail. They weren't interested. And so when I came out of the Service . . . I have to back up a little bit. I tried to get a position at DC Comics I think when I was around 13. I had worked up some samples of my "Jim Turner, American Spy" thing, only I had progressed now from pencils to ink. Never knowing how any of the comics were drawn, not realizing how large each panel was, my pictures were about the size of a postage stamp. *(Laughter.)* So I walked in with this artwork that was pathetic — but I thought it was great, not being able to compare it with anything — and the editor sort of put on a big broad smile and felt that he would educate me rather quickly, *show* me what I would have to be doing in order to be in line for a position, so he brought out **Jack Kirby's** work. And of course I couldn't believe that human hands did such a thing! It was so mind-boggling to me, I felt in complete awe of it! The advice given to me was to go to art school, which I did a little bit of, and I went to the Art Students League, and this is all before going into the Service or taking that first job at Fiction House. I only went there for a short time, like on weekends — I was still going to school — so I didn't stay at the League very long. Me and school never got along too well. *(Laughter.)* So I had a short stint there, and then I just kept on drawing and eventually I got this position as I grew older. And then I went into the Service, and when I got out the first thing I did was set my cap for a company. I went to the candy store and picked up a book, any book, and I saw Atlas's name there and **Stan Lee** as editor, and I figured this was as good a place as any. Since I hadn't been accepted at DC I decided to shoot for Stan. Also, I did take their advice. I did go to school, I went *back* to the Art Students League under the G.I. Bill and learned a little bit more. Then I hit Stan and I got my job immediately.

...ATTACKED PEARL HARBOR! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! WHY DON'T THEY MOVE US OUT OF HERE! WE'RE CIVILIANS! I'M NOT GONNA FIGHT!
DUKE! DUKE! THOSE PLANES! WHOSE ARE THEY?

From "WAKE!", an E.C. classic drawn by Gene and scripted by Harvey Kurtzman.

LOU: *And this would have been in 1948?*

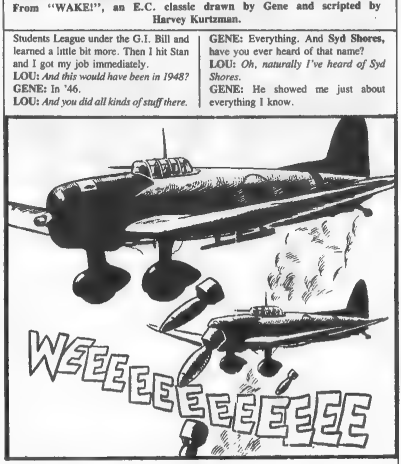
GENE: In '46.

LOU: *And you did all kinds of stuff there.*

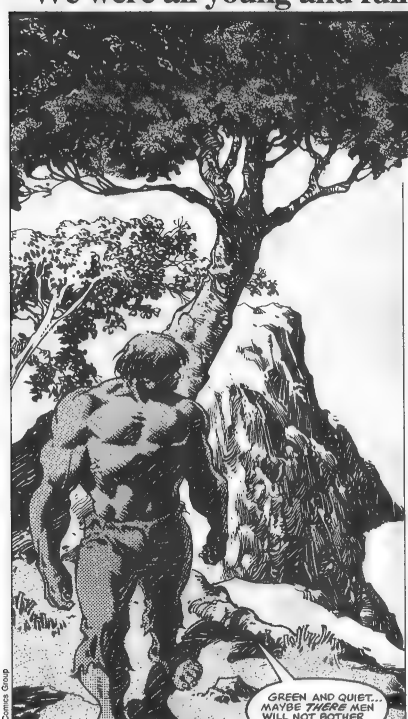
GENE: Everything. And **Syd Shores,** have you ever heard of that name?

LOU: *Oh, naturally I've heard of Syd Shores.*

GENE: He showed me just about everything I know.



"We were all young and full of the devil."



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Before there was COMICS INTERVIEW, there was David Kraft, comics writer, who scripted this beautiful Gene Colan splash from THE HULK MAGAZINE #24, 1980.

LOU: *And he ended up inking you on DAREDEVIL about 20 years later, as I recall.*

GENE: Yes, and that's a pity because **Syd Shores** was one *heck* of an artist really! I don't think Stan appreciated him. Too bad, because I think he missed out on a great bet.

LOU: *What was it like working for Stan back in 1946 or so?*

GENE: Oh, it was a lot of fun! I met a lot of people there, it was a great experience. There were maybe 12 or 15 people in the Bullpen, we were all young and full of the devil. *(Laughter.)* And we were working real hard at the comics and at the same time laughed our way through from Monday to Friday, so it was great, a great experience. I stayed there for about three years I think, a total of *around* three years, and then I had my first opportunity to do some free-lance so I took it. So that's how it all got started.

LOU: *You ended up working for Ziff-Davis and Ace and Quality and all those kind of people.*

GENE: Everybody you can think of in New York. I even got work from DC.

LOU: *Right, you did a lot of stuff for the war books, all the way through the 1960s. And as a matter of fact when you went back to Marvel in '65 to do SUB-MARINER — which I have great memories of — you had to use an alias, Adam Austin.*

GENE: That was *my* fear. I didn't want anyone from DC to know that I was doing any work for Marvel, thinking it wouldn't go well for me if I did tell them, so I just worked up that name. Of course artwork is like handwriting, you really can't disguise it and everybody knew who it was anyway. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I remember Fred Hembeck saying in a cartoon of his that way back in '66 his two favorite artists were Adam Austin at Marvel and Gene Colan at Warren, and he felt like a real klutz when they found out they were one and the same person.*

GENE: *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *You worked for Warren shortly after they opened CREEPY and EERIE up.*

"I tried to make DR. STRANGE look authentic."

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GENE: That's right.

LOU: *Did Archie Goodwin tailor the stories for you, like "Thing of Darkness" and such like that?*

GENE: Well, I don't know, I work very well with Archie. We had a very good relationship. Then I think he moved on, he went to another place, and that was the end of that.

LOU: *And everybody at that time seemed to move away from Warren, too.*

GENE: I . . . Once Archie left that was it.

LOU: *I remember the first one you did for Marvel back in '65 was SUB-MARINER, and I remember the water and the motion, you know. Those two things are the impression that I get of SUB-MARINER, all of that flowing energy. On DAREDEVIL in the 1960s, you got it after John Romita and after Wally Wood, and it became your strip so much so that you did as long a run of issues on that as anybody did.*

GENE: I think so, I'm not sure of that. **John Romita** did it before I did it. I don't remember what it was but it was a *long* time that I stayed on it.

LOU: *How did you feel about doing that strip?*

GENE: It was a lot of fun. I managed to put some kind of feeling into it, and it was full of action. What I enjoyed about it mostly, or anything that I did for Marvel at that time, was the freedom that Stan gave me. He would give me just the *nucleus* of the story and I . . . I wrote it. I didn't write it with words, I just wrote it with pictures. Sometimes he would just give me a five-sentence plot — and I say five sentences and I *mean* it, and he would say *do* it — and I would build the whole story from those five sentences. You see, that was the only way he could handle all of the titles that he was writing at that time.

LOU: *Right, because he was writing just about everything coming from Marvel at that time.*

GENE: Oh, my God, yes. And then he would get all of the artwork in front of him and he would write the story around it.

LOU: *And he worked that way with all of his books, IRON MAN, DOCTOR STRANGE?*

GENE: Yeah. I really got into DOCTOR STRANGE when I did it, I tried to make it look authentic. I tried to make it more believable, not just with dreamscapes and that kind of stuff. For instance his building was down in the Village, so I went down to the Village and took a lot of pictures, more just to capture the atmosphere of the Village. And that attitude with realism, it was a lot of fun to do that.

LOU: *Right, only you'd have Doctor Strange's building which didn't exist right in the middle of a bunch of buildings which did.*

DON'T GET IMPATIENT, LADS!
I'LL TRY TO GIVE EACH ONE OF YOU HIS TURN!
BUT I'VE ONLY GOT TWO FEET!
BOK!
WOP!
MY ONLY CHANCE IS SPEED--I'VE GOTTA KEEP THEM OFF BALANCE!
AT LEAST THE JUDGE IS SAFE UNDER THE TABLE--FOR A WHILE!
KRUNCH!

GENE: That's right, that's what I did. I would put this phony-looking house right in between these two other buildings that did exist. *(Laughter.)* I had a lot of fun with all that. When Stan moved out and **Shooter** took over it became a whole different ball game. **Roy Thomas** was in there for awhile, and I think **Gerry Conway** was in there for a short time. **Steve Gerber** was a lot of fun to work with.

LOU: *Right. The one I remember you best on from the 1970s was TOMB OF DRACULA. Is it true, you wanted that title so much —*

GENE: I auditioned for it.

LOU: *Bill Everett was originally scheduled to do that.*

GENE: That's right.

LOU: *Can you tell me something about how you got it?*

GENE: Well, Stan had talked about it to me before he ever said a thing about Bill — that was news to me that he was going to do TOMB OF DRACULA. He just came out of left field and said, "Gene, look, I can't give you the book." I said, "Why not? I thought I was supposed to have it." He said, "No, I told **Bill Everett** long before I told you." I was real upset at that. I said, "Stan, you're making a *big* mistake." He said that was the way it was, so I didn't take it lying down. What I did

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"I said 'Stan, you're making a big mistake."

was I spent the day making up some samples of what I thought Dracula should look like, and I sent them in, and the following day he got it and he called me and said the job was mine! Based on those samples, that was the audition that got me the book.

LOU: *I read DRACULA as a child and it's still my favorite horror book, and after seeing TOMB OF DRACULA I said, "Yes, that's Dracula!" It was unlike the other comic representations I'd seen of Dracula in that it reminded me of the Dracula from Bram Stoker's DRACULA.*

GENE: I fashioned him after **Jack Palance,** actually.

LOU: *Oh!*

GENE: But **Jack Palance** never did Dracula so it looked —

LOU: *He did appear as Dracula —*

GENE: But that was after. It was DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE that kind of triggered it — it came out around that time or maybe some time just before. I said, "God, there's a guy that could play Dracula." And that's what I did, I used him as the model, literally, as Dracula.

LOU: *I would never have figured that.*

GENE: Yeah. You know, **Marv Wolfman** was another guy that was good to work with. If there was anything I didn't understand or that I wanted to enhance, I'd call him up and we'd talk and that's how it went for I don't know how many years I was on it. That was the relationship, that easygoing way of doing things, and Marv accepted that as my way of doing things.

LOU: *One thing that I noticed about that series is that it dealt with the nature of good. Most series deal with the nature of evil, and you certainly did that in TOMB OF DRACULA, but you dealt with the nature of good as well.*

GENE: That's because Marv wrote it in there.

LOU: *And one of the things that really impressed me was it seemed to be a violent book but you never saw anything really gross.*

GENE: No. That's how I thought it should be. As a matter of fact that's how I think things should be today, but that doesn't happen.

LOU: *Right, and that was one good horror series, it will probably never be equalled. But about 1977 the whole thing started going right down into the tubes, when the last comic-book issue was put out.*

GENE: Yeah. Was that when it was?

LOU: *It was '77 or '78.*

GENE: I thought it was later than that, sometime in 1979 when they switched over to the magazine.

LOU: *Yeah, I wasn't talking about that but when it started to go downhill, like in 1977, and when it finally got bad enough they put it in the magazine.*

GENE: It happened when **Shooter** came around.

LOU: *Now I guess you can give me the difference between Stan and Shooter there.*

GENE: Well, Stan was really gearing things up for when he decided to leave for the coast. He needed somebody to fill his shoes because evidently he wasn't going to be leaving until he found someone. I know that **Marv Wolfman** had tried it and didn't care for it. **Roy Thomas** had tried it and it didn't work out, at least that's what I *think* happened. So **Shooter** came along and he *did* want it. That was at a time when **John Verpooten** was running the show up there. Unfortunately John passed away, he was one heck of a guy, such a sweet fellow. So then **Shooter** took over, and it was very difficult. I could tell from the start that things were going to get harder and it did, and eventually I just didn't want to continue with Marvel anymore. I felt that he was taking away any artistic ability that I had by insisting that things be done his way. And he didn't really care for my work, really. Eventually he took me off of DRACULA and then it got to the point where I'd just had enough.

LOU: *So I guess it was at this point that you just finally told him off?*

GENE: Well, I had a confrontation with him and with a vice president, and *he* wanted me to stay but I told him I couldn't stay on there if **Shooter** was going to be constantly doing those things to me.

LOU: *That seems to have been the attitude of a lot of people. Gene, let's talk about*

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CONFLICT!
THEM ROCKET GRENADES SURE GOT THIS ONE!
UHHHHHHH...

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #27 Connie investigates her past--Dragon and Serpent explore their future -- and Electrode alone must defend Atlanta from a psychopath with a gun!

By Henry Vogel

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"I'm working on SILVERBLADE, with Cary Bates."

From CREEPY #8, in 1965, written by Archie Goodwin.

HOWARD. How did you first encounter Steve Gerber and HOWARD THE DUCK?

GENE: Well, I think **John Buscema** did one or two issues of HOWARD and didn't want to continue with it, he didn't feel that it was anything he enjoyed doing or wanted to do, and I just got it next. They asked me if I wanted to do it, and I love to caricature and cartoon occasionally and I'd never had a chance to do it before with Marvel, so I grabbed it as an opportunity. And I enjoyed every bit of it.

LOU: *How was it like working with Steve?*

GENE: Very good, he's a very funny guy and very talented as a writer. I do think one day he's going to come up with something real big. I thought he almost made it with the film but that didn't pan out too well. But I enjoyed working with him. I had no trouble until we got a syndicated strip to do, and then a lot of trouble started. He wasn't on time with the story plots and I was trying to burn the candle at both ends by doing regular comic-book work and at the same time doing HOWARD THE DUCK. Nothing panned out, it was just impossible.

LOU: *Basically it just ate itself up in a very short time.*

GENE: Right. But I had been doing HOWARD for a good number of years prior to that.

LOU: *So that was the entire thing basically that I guess got Gerber separated from Marvel in the first place, but you later collaborated on STEWART THE RAT.*

GENE: Right. Then he did something for **Dean Mullaney** at Eclipse and he asked me if I'd like to do STEWART THE RAT and I said sure. He probably felt . . . first of all he would have owned it and not have to share any of the profits with Marvel or anybody else. But it just didn't work out, you know. We did the one story and that's as far as it ever got.

LOU: *Okay, at DC in the '80s the one thing I remember you for mostly is BATMAN, working with Gerry Conway and Doug Moench. It seemed like you liked doing BATMAN a lot. Was there a lot of echoes of DAREDEVIL in that?*

GENE: Well, again it was an atmospheric type of series and for that reason I liked it. And then I did WONDER WOMAN, which I didn't care for and I didn't think I was well suited to it, and then other things came along, I did a lot of things for DC. Eventually you know what has become of Batman today.

LOU: *Yeah, Batman has been recast in the image of Frank Miller.*

GENE: Right. **Miller** is a very innovative guy and he's turned **Batman** into something quite super. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I always thought it was a shame that NIGHT FORCE didn't pan out.*

GENE: I felt it was a little too confusing to the reader. Too many things were happening, too many characters jumping in and out. It was kind of hard to keep up with and, well, it just didn't make it.

LOU: *Right. You couldn't pick up an issue and understand what was going on without the whole run, which is what happened to me.*

GENE: Right.

LOU: *But I did enjoy them after I'd gotten the whole set of them and read them through like that.*

GENE: There's been talk of bringing it back but nothing's happened yet.

LOU: *Well, Gene, what are you currently working on? I hate to sound that ignorant.*

GENE: I'm working on SILVERBLADE with **Cary Bates.** Another sweetheart, Cary. He's a very good writer and very easy to get along with. It's not the first thing I've worked with him on, I did NIGHTWINGS with him, a science-fiction one-shot deal that I don't think did all that well. But I don't think the full story on that is even in. So this is the second attempt at doing something with Cary, and from what I hear it's doing very well.

LOU: *Are you enjoying working on it?*

GENE: Yes! I was doing SPECTRE but I couldn't hold down the two books so I gave up one.

LOU: *I like that SPECTRE series, by the way. It's probably the best of the SPECTREs with the exception, of course, of the Gardner Fox stuff. But I really thought you did a good job on that with Doug.*

GENE: Thank you.

LOU: *So, any parting thoughts on having been, I guess, over 40 years in comics? What are the things that stand out in your mind most about working in comics?*

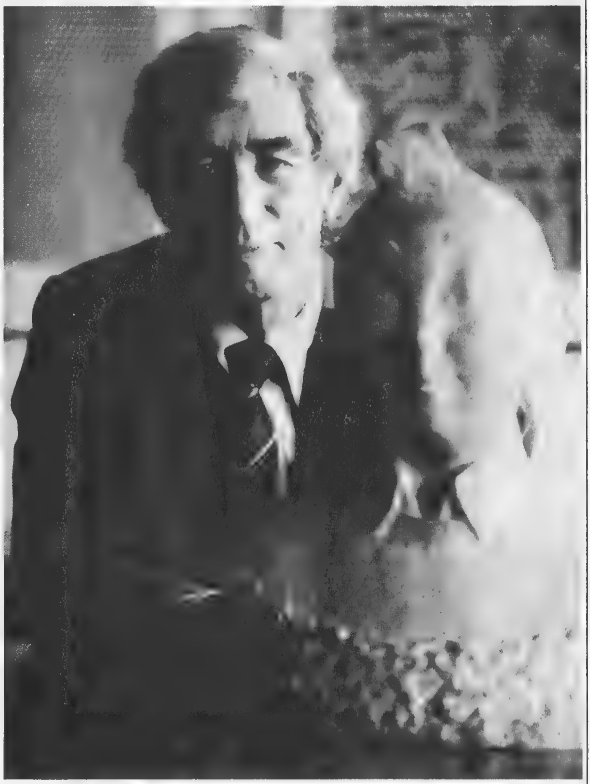
GENE: Well, you know, you're like a movie director in a sense, you have your cast of characters and you set up the shots. I enjoy it. It's like making movies. *(Laughter.)* Although it really isn't, it's similar I imagine.

LOU: *Would you have liked to have made movies?*

GENE: Oh, I think so, yes! It's not that it's too late . . . I don't know. You know, you kind of tend to travel the same road. I'm used to this and it's very comfortable for me, like an old slipper. And I enjoy doing it very much, especially if something interesting comes along.

ALAIN BARAN

"Herge knew me before I knew him,



Herge (Georges Remi) with his greatest creation, TINTIN.

I was a baby when he first met me."

ALAIN BARAN

Crossing the border into Belgium on the route from Lille, France, on a sunny Saturday is like crossing the border from reality into a picturesque pastoral painting. Rolling green pastures dotted with white cows, small strands of slim, tall, straight trees, and scattered stone barns and farm houses greet the visitor with a welcome sense of serenity.

Given that Brussels is the largest city in Belgium, it manages to couple quaintness — cobblestones and street trolleys — with cosmopolitan savoir faire somehow reminiscent of Zurich.

It is, of course, the home of perhaps the single most popular and long-lived European comics character of all — Tintin.

And so we met with Alain Baran, director of Fondation Herge, which now looks after Tintin in the absence of the artist, but with a great respect for his work . . .

All art accompanying this interview is © 1988 Casterman/Fondation Herge.

"Herge discovered LITTLE NEMO and others."

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *Just before we turned on the recorder, we were discussing Lone Wolf and the story in which he must meet the Buddha and kill the Buddha. Alain, you mentioned that symbolically we have to do that with our parents, and that there is a similarity in Herge.*

ALAIN BARAN: Yes. **Herge** has created his own books and he always said when he died that he didn't want anybody to go on with the TINTIN books. He said, "TINTIN is my whole life, I have put *everything* in the books, all of my soul. When Tintin is running, I am running. When Captain Haddock is angry, I am angry myself. Everything out of the books is my soul." **Herge** had assistants — people who are growing — who could have continued the books; yet he said, "Of course they would do it very well, but it would be something else, and I don't want TINTIN to become something else." That's why when he died we would not create new TINTIN books. Three years after his death we published his unfinished book called TINTIN AND THE ART FORGERS, and it's not a *usual* book, it's sketches of what could have been. You see, if someone else would have drawn the book it wouldn't have been a TINTIN book. **Herge** would have still changed the script, still changed the sketch, and so we don't want to publish it done by someone else, just done by **Herge** himself.

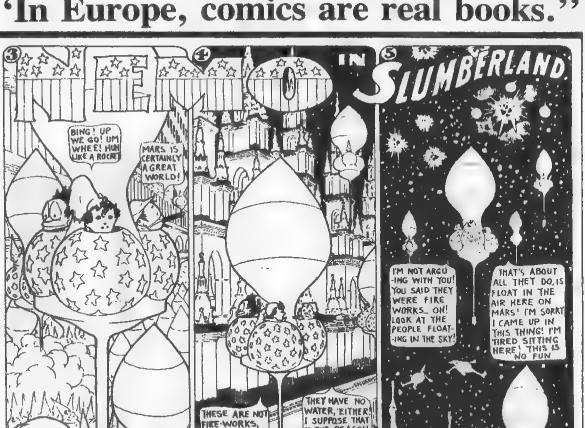
1
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO UP IN A SKY BOMB? THAT IS ONE OF OUR BEST FOURTH OF JULY SPORTS. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY ONE?
ANY THING YOU SAY, WE'LL DO!
YES. WE'LL TRY A 'WHAT YOU CALL IT!'
AIR
2
WE WON'T GET HURT, WILL WE? WE GET HURT WHERE WE CARE FROM QUITE OFTEN!
SIT DOWN! NEMO! YOU CAN'T GET HURT AN' WHAT IF YOU DO? IT'S FOURTH OF JULY!
AIR
YOU WILL NOT GET HURT! JUST SAY STILL THAT'S ALL! ARE YOU CLEAR?

Herge created in 1956 Studio Herge, mainly to help him with his books and his work, and when he died we had people who were working in Studio Herge, and we tried to go ahead — knowing, of course, that we *wouldn't* produce any more books. But the books are kind of a nucleus and around you have satellites, and every satellite can grow because it's related to the main nucleus. Unfortunately, we couldn't do it with the people who were here because they were so deep . . . so *used* to this work, this particular work of creating the books, that they couldn't go ahead in another way. And last year we decided to stop, jointly, and created Fondation Herge.

And going back to the Japanese story about Buddha, we say **Herge's** work is there, it exists on its own. If you want to have something new then we have to kill the creation of the books — because **Herge** himself would say it. So we kill this situation, say it is finished, and now we can really work in other ways. What is important is to understand what has been, what is in the work, and to use it for new things.

For instance, Tintin is a character who is always looking for everything in the world — he is looking for the Chinese

"In Europe, comics are real books."


3
BING! UP WE GO! UM WHEE! HUH LIKE A ROCKET
MARS IS CERTAINLY A GREAT WORLD!
SIT STILL! DON'T GET FRIGHTENED AND I'LL SEE YOU NEXT WEEK! THIS WILL SHOOT YOU UP FIVE HUNDRED MILES INTO THE AIR!
4
THESE ARE NOT FIRE-WORKS, FOR THEY HAVE NO FIRE ON MARS! THEY CALL THEM GAS WORKS, FLIP!
THEY HAVE NO WATER, EITHER! I SUPPOSE THAT IS THE REASON THEY DON'T CALL THEM WATER WORKS! QUIT ARGUING WIM!
IN
5
SLUMBERLAND
I'M NOT ARGU-ING WITH YOU! YOU SAID THEY WERE FIRE WORKS.. OH! LOOK AT THE PEOPLE FLOAT-ING IN THE SKY!
THAT'S ABOUT ALL THEY DO, IS FLOAT IN THE AIR HERE ON MARS! I'M SORRY I CAME UP IN THIS THING! I'M TIRED SITTING HERE! THIS IS NO FUN

philosophy, he is looking for the South American philosophy, the people, the way they live; you know, he is the reporter, someone who is going somewhere to see what is going on over there — and *that's* TINTIN, that's the aim of the books. So now we can try to use this philosophy in a different way in a new creation, and TINTIN will be there as a leader to show the way to realize this philosophy.

DAK: *So, will you be sponsoring new projects?*

ALAIN: Yes. We are working right now on a new magazine for children. You might have heard about TINTIN MAGAZINE, it was created in 1946, it was a weekly magazine, and we are now trying to work out a new magazine with comics but also many other things, more text, in order to be related to what I told you about **Herge's** philosophy, TINTIN's philosophy, to try to bring to the children information regarding, for instance, China, the States, science, history, philosophy, sports. It's really journalism, in a way, but in the TINTIN way.

DAK: *Is this close to being realized?*

ALAIN: Yeah, in about six months we might launch the first issue.

DAK: *Well, the interesting thing is that as well known as TINTIN is elsewhere, in the States —*

ALAIN: It's different.

DAK: *I was wondering if you had any observation as to why —?*

ALAIN: First, I think it is very interesting that **Herge** — before creating TINTIN — discovered the American comics, LITTLE NEMO and others. It was in 1926 and '27 someone went to the States and came back with some of these comics and brought them to **Herge** and he was very impressed, and he started TINTIN with — I wouldn't say the influence — but with the *spirit* of the American comics. When he

"Money is a consequence, not the main thing."

IF YOU CAN KILL ME, THEN YOU SHALL HAVE ACHIEVED MUMONKAN BY WAY OF THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD. WHEN YOU MEET THE BUDDHA, KILL THE BUDDHA.
WHEN YOU MEET YOUR PARENTS, KILL YOUR PARENTS. NOTHINGNESS, INDEED! THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD IS THE WAY FOR YOU.

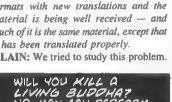
created TINTIN it was very quickly a big hit, and since has always been improving in Europe and also in India, for instance, and in Indonesia, and in Japan it's started. In the States the books were published for the first time about 20 years ago, and it's improving each year but *very* slowly. We try to understand why! Is it the publishing? Is it the public? Is it the distribution?

One of the answers is that TINTIN books are *books*, are not the usual comics you are used to in the States. It's not a pulp magazine. It's not something that you read and you don't keep (that's the way we understand American comics). In Europe comics are real books. That means that people buy the books and keep the books and give them to their children — it's a kind of tradition. Regarding the States, we have understood that people who were really fond of TINTIN were either people who had been immigrating to the States during this century, which means that they were still European, and also Jewish people, and also students. It's very interesting to see how TINTIN is known in the universities. We understood that that was maybe because they were more familiar to the background of the TINTIN books.

And maybe for the general public and children, maybe they are more familiar with superheroes and less exotic stories. And what we have heard also, it's about the translation: some of the critics that received the books observed that it was too British, because it was originally created in French and was translated into English, and it's the English version that was published in the States. That's maybe why children in the States are not really involved with this kind of books, because it's *too* British. We heard this.

DAK: *It's interesting how a translation can affect things. HEAVY METAL magazine in the United States translated a bunch of Moebius material which was not very well received, and now Marvel is collecting the Moebius material in book formats with new translations and the material is being well received — and much of it is the same material, except that it has been translated properly.*

ALAIN: We tried to study this problem.



It's funny because in certain moments we would say, "Let's translate the books in America." And we had also ... I wouldn't say critics, but people would say to us, "You shouldn't do that because from the beginning it's something different." If you adapt the books to the American language, it could not really work.

DAK: *You may lose something.*

ALAIN: Yeah. We still are wondering whether we should translate or not.

DAK: *In the case with Moebius, Jean-Marc Lofficier is doing the translations and he is very familiar with the work and is able to remain faithful to the originals without altering it, and yet make it acceptable. If you have the good fortune to find somebody in that position, who respects the original work and understands the spirit, that would be a boon. I don't believe American culture is all that different — or that TINTIN either esoteric or alien.*

ALAIN: What's really fantastic with TINTIN is — as I told you a few moments ago — his popularity in India, for instance, or in Indonesia. It's wonderful to receive letters from children from those countries. They are very far, the culture is very different, and still they have the same interest

"It's really journalism in a way, the TINTIN way."

as a Belgian or a French reader. This is very fantastic.

With TINTIN something which is also very interesting is that you have as readers children, from age seven to ten they discover the story, the very primary discovery; and then you have the students of around 20, who discover that the background is real; and then you have the adults, 40, 50, 60, who are more reading the books for the psychology, for the philosophy they can find in the books. It's very ... very strange, to take three different categories and see that each age discovers one.

DAK: *Well, we have heard talk of perhaps a TINTIN movie being produced by Steven Spielberg, and I think it goes without saying that if that ever comes about that'll be the push that it needs in the States.*

ALAIN: We talked with **Spielberg** about five years ago. We still don't know. We have had some adaptations from films with TINTIN, but *none* of them was a real success. This may come from the fact that it is very difficult to adapt. It's such a *special* world, in a way realistic but also pure imagination, and it's very difficult to have the same feeling in the film. Either it's too realistic or it's too fictional. We have never found the right way to adapt the characters.

The only thing we were quite happy about with Steven — no, not only, the *main* thing — is that in his film he can create an atmosphere which is very particular, and this atmosphere you can find also in the TINTIN books. I think that's why he was interested in **Herge**, because he found the same atmosphere. It's very difficult to define it, but it's more the atmosphere of the adventures in the books

than the characters. But of course the characters *have* to be in the film, *that's* where the problem is. Until now unfortunately we haven't succeeded, we don't do it.

DAK: *We heard that the scriptwriter was the one who had written the E.T. movie.*

ALAIN: Yes. She has already worked on one script and it didn't work, and tries to work on the second one and we are not sure it is going to work. But what we have appreciated very much is to have worked with **Steven Spielberg** on a project, and I think he may be the one to produce such a film. We have worked for five years already, talked together about this film, and even if it doesn't succeed I think we have first of all worked out a friendship, which is very important, and secondly we have learned a lot from this. But we still don't know for certain.

DAK: *We heard Roman Polanski was considered to direct —*

ALAIN: True.

DAK: *— because of the setting in the Eastern bloc countries. When you put those elements together, it certainly sounds very interesting.*

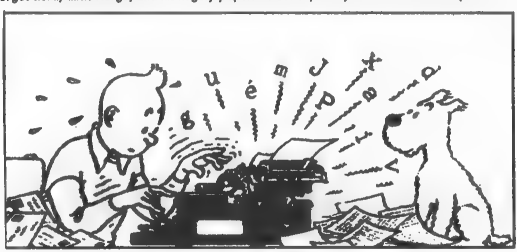
ALAIN: Yes, it is, definitely. We have talked about the mentalities of the markets, and we share the same philosophy about merchandising; Steven had a quite difficult experience with E.T., for instance. When the film was released it was *such* a success, he had so many proposals for merchandising, so he said why not and he accepted a lot of things — and we did the same with TINTIN for a while — and it was bad. Bad for the film, bad for our books, to have a big merchandising, a big market, big commercial use of the character, the property. He decided to control much more the merchandising from his films, and about the same moment we said we are going to control much more the merchandising aspect of the TINTIN books. And this is what I meant about the friendship and the relationship — I think it's very important to see that people are sharing the same ideas, the same philosophy. I think we are creating a new mentality in merchandising.

DAK: *Maybe merchandising is maturing? There's not always a lot of respect for successful characters. One that springs to mind is James Bond — the Ian Fleming estate has sanctioned further books, which of course do not have the spirit of the originals.*

ALAIN: True.

DAK: *And while on one level the John Gardner pastiches have been a success, what was lost is what was unique*

Sixty years of success:
Georges Remi, alias Hergé, and his hugely popular creation, Tintin, with his faithful companion Snowy



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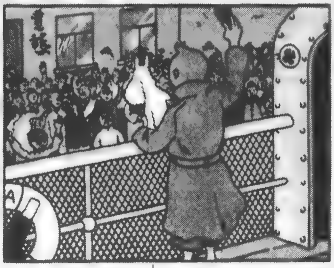
"Herge in his way is also popular art."



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to say now it's finished. That's what has been my work. And when **Herge** died his wife became the boss, the big boss, and we work to help her. Myself, everything is commercial and problems related to the books. **Herge's** main assistant, whose name is **Bob de Moor** and who is an author himself, he has to control all of the artistic problems related to the books and to the general use of Tintin. When we decided to stop Studio Herge in 1986, **Bob de Moor** was a creator — in fact he dreamed of drawing TINTIN books himself, and it was very difficult for him to accept that there would never be another TINTIN book — so he decided to create new books to draw himself. And now we have many people working with us. But we don't want to have a big company because we don't want to produce. We want to make things and to help people around us, but not to have a big company. And my work, I would say, is to control everything and to prepare new things. For instance I told you about the magazine, I have created a new concept. And for the film, for instance, I will be in charge of this project. I would say I just have general control of everything that is related to TINTIN, that's my job.

JULIA: *One thing we noticed here are scenes from TINTIN enamelled on galvanized metal, and they're very expensive —*

ALAIN: That's the problem, unfortunately, with those kind of things, it's very nice merchandise but it's quite expensive. We have been three years accepting things like that, which is kind of nostalgia and it has a lot of success with the consumers. We have also cards, very stylistic, *from* the books, and very popular.

JULIA: *Compared to things that are done in American merchandising, they are very expensive.*

ALAIN: Very. We are trying to find more articles that are more popular and cheaper, but it's very difficult. For instance, we would like to produce a game for children, but before we do it we want to have a real good idea.

JULIA: *Something that could go on forever?*

ALAIN: Yes. We would like to support something that is really popular, and it helps TINTIN but it's something ... TINTIN is a kind of leader, and it's not just the use of TINTIN in order to make money.

JULIA: *Have you had any proposals for a TINTIN role-playing game that you've considered?*

ALAIN: Until now, no. We have had a lot of proposals coming to us, and there also we want to be in control. In London, in Covent Garden there is a shop with the

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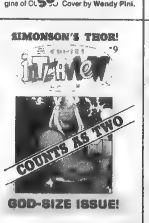

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"Herge was very much a fan of modern art."

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originally.

ALAIN: Exactly. And it's very difficult to explain that to people because, when you have someone who wants to *use* the characters they say, "But we bring you money, what are you talking about? We bring you money." And you say, "No." I'm sorry but if you want to have a long-term existence you cannot accept short-term profits.

JULIA MATHER: *Because something like an E.T. cuddly toy will be a good thing one year and then it will be considered over.*

ALAIN: Yeah, exactly, one year. And it's very difficult because many of the licensees they just use an emblem, that's it, but inside there must be something. And we say if you have some merchandising then you have to help and to give the consumer the possibility to come back in the world of this character, to *live* in this world, and not just to have the image — and yes, it's a nice image; or yes, it's a promotion in order to promote IBM or another big company, but it won't serve the character. And I think it's much more interesting to say you have the character and you have the company and for a one-shot it's an association, they have a certain experience together.

DAK: *Can I ask you a little bit about how you came to be . . . what would be your title?*

ALAIN: Myself? I was here, came here in 1978, and I would say Herge knew me before I knew him — because I was a little baby when he first met me, he was a friend of my mother. I always lived with TINTIN books, like every child here in Europe, and I arrived here in 1978 in order to be his personal secretary. In the time when Studio Herge was, as I told you before, only dedicated to the books, I talked about the way to manage, to control this property. And Herge before the '80s was only interested in the books — everything else, for instance merchandising, he didn't really care, because it wasn't his life, it wasn't his work. He didn't want anybody else to draw TINTIN, even for merchandising or promotion, so he was very concerned about the drawings, but not about the commercial aspect and the philosophical aspect. He didn't know what to do. So he had a lot of agents and people were doing it for him — he had partners, but they were independent — and slowly I brought back everything, control from the beginning to the end.

It wasn't very easy because people were used to working in a certain way for thirty or even forty years, so it's very difficult

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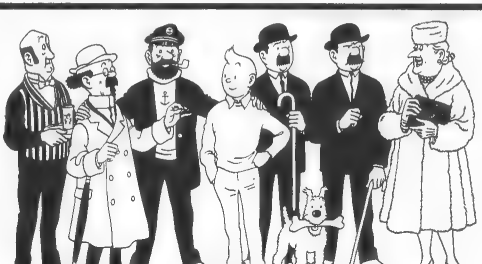
"TINTIN is a kind of leader."



articles of TINTIN — you should go there, it is a very interesting experience produced by a young Englishman. He has created a shop in order to sell there TINTIN products, products that he is importing himself, producing himself, and he started about four years ago and each year it has been improving. That's the way that I want to work also, to go ahead with the merchandising. He is someone who is producing. **Nick Rodwell.** He is in Japan right now for one week, because we are large in the merchandising over there, and then he will be back — so you go there. He's a very nice man.

DAK: *Do you think the TINTIN movie will come about? Does it look like a possibility?*

ALAIN: To be very frank, I'm not sure, because we didn't find the right way to produce it. And that's what I like about Steven; even if he has spent a lot of money on it, he *won't* produce if we still didn't catch what is TINTIN. And at the present time we don't feel this film is what we would want.

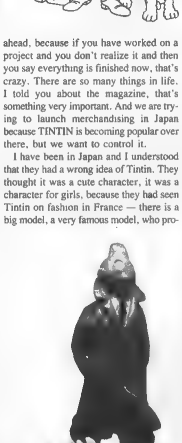
JULIA: *You want to do it well rather than just do it.*

ALAIN: Yes, exactly. And I think we win even if we don't do the project. We are winners because we have tried, we have worked on it. You always have something, you always win something, even if a project isn't realized — and we have won already something with this relation with Steven, working together. If we go ahead and do the film, yes, of course we will be happy, but we don't need to do the film.

DAK: *I think that's the best attitude to take.*

ALAIN: Sure. It's the only way to go ahead, because if you have worked on a project and you don't realize it and then you say everything is finished now, that's crazy. There are so many things in life. I told you about the magazine, that's something very important. And we are trying to launch merchandising in Japan because TINTIN is becoming popular over there, but we want to control it.

I have been in Japan and I understood that they had a wrong idea of Tintin. They thought it was a cute character, it was a character for girls, because they had seen Tintin on fashion in France — there is a big model, a very famous model, who produced a very nice sweatshirt and T-shirt, **Castel Bagaec**, very high fashion. And then the Japanese saw it and they said, "Oh, that's nice, we want to have the same." But they didn't see it right. And the books are improving there, but still not as popular as they should be, as they *will* be. So we said we don't do anything then, because we feel there is danger to have this success for maybe one or two or three years, a lot of money, and then that's it. So we are trying to launch merchandising properly with the right products. And I am going to Brazil because there also we think we have found *another* big problem. It takes time. Money is a consequence, not the main thing.



DAK: *As happiness is. You set out to seek it, how do you find it? You do other things and that's a result.*

ALAIN: Exactly. But we are quite lucky because we don't *run* from it. We have enough money to work on the new things and we don't need the big money in this company to produce. This is important, this is freedom.

DAK: *Who publishes the books in America?*

ALAIN: It's Atlantic-Little, Brown, and it's very particular because Atlantic-Little, Brown is not a comics publisher, is not what we call a general public publisher. It is in Boston and is very British in mentality, and they mostly publish artistic books and scientific books. And they have a very small department for children. But I think they were quite courageous to start with TINTIN fifteen or twenty years ago, and we sell about 100,000 books a year, which is not bad. Of course it is *far* from what we could expect from such a market,

"In Europe comics became something

but we think there is still a lot of work to do.

DAK: *Do they have all of the volumes in print?*

ALAIN: I think they have 20 to 22, not all. But still they sell each year about 100,000 books. They are trying to promote them. Of course to find the best ways, we are looking now for other ways.

DAK: *We also noticed a crossover from the art field in the States. I noticed there's an expensive volume that has a cover by Keith Herring, whose work I still remember from the days when he drew in the subways. You know, he would go at night in the subways and wherever they had not put up a poster he would take chalk and draw his little men; he went through all of the subways and did that, and of course no one knew who he was, he was a mystery artist. And it's been interesting to watch how he has come up in the art establishment, and I was quite surprised then when I saw that he had done the jacket for the TINTIN book.*

ALAIN: Yeah. He came here six months ago for an exhibition, and the book, the biography about **Herge,** is written by two men, **Thierry Smolderen** and **Pierre Sterckx. Pierre Sterckx** is the director of an art school in Brussels, he is a critic, and he was very important for **Herge** also because **Herge** in the 1960s discovered modern art, he was very much a fan of modern art. And **Pierre Sterckx** met **Keith Herring** a few months ago and told him about **Herge,** and **Keith Herring** said, "Oh yes, **Herge,** TINTIN, I love it!" This is very nice. And it's nice also to meet *young* people, young artists, who are really loving so much the TINTIN books.

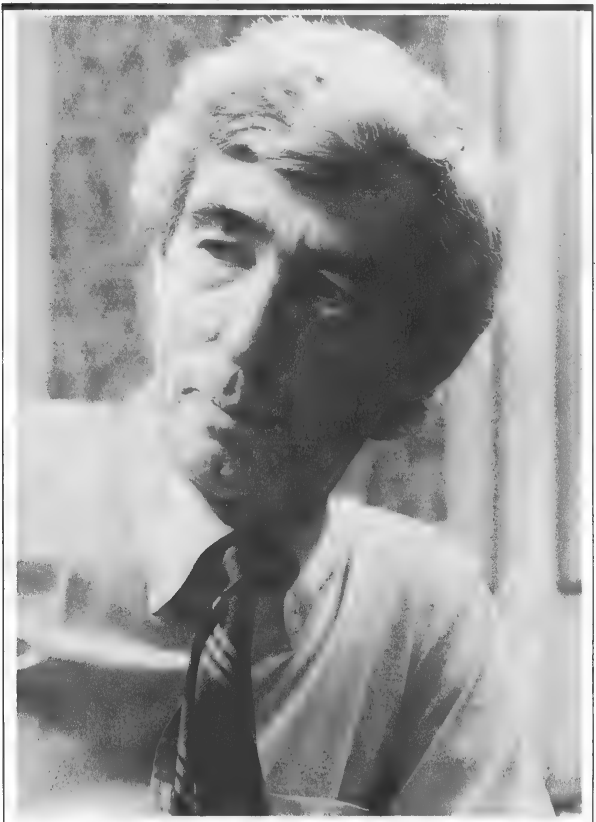
DAK: *In the States comics are not as well respected as they are in Europe. That perception is changing but they are thought of still in many areas as throwaway items.*

ALAIN: Yeah, it's a bit vulgar — coming from the Latin *vulgus* it means "for the people, for the masses." But there is a popular art and I think **Keith Herring** is one of the people who are representing popular art. And **Herge** in his way is also popular art.

DAK: *Also we were looking at the gallery here in Brussels that sells comic-book art, and the value that is attached here is much higher than in America, where they have not yet come to value many of the artists who were the founding fathers in the comics field.*

ALAIN: But I think in the States — it's changing — but it's still for children, literature for children; but in Europe, mostly in France and in Belgium, comics became something more than only literature for children, although it is *also* literature for children. TINTIN is for children first of all, but it's also for students, for adults, and it's something *more* than children's literature.

more than only literature for children."



The legendary Herge.

"Publishers can't function without printers—at

Photo: Gilbert Koehn

least they can't make money without printers."

LINDA STANLEY

David Anthony Kraft and I were at the COMICS INTERVIEW booth at the Chicago Comicon — you remember DAK, the guy who in the first issue of this magazine promised to bring us interviews from "every fascinating comics-associated area you can think of" — and I said to him, "Gee, y'know, you've never had an interview with a printer." So David said, "Then why don't you get one."

As it happened, Sleepeck Printing had purchased a room at the convention — for reasons which will be told — so I didn't have very far to go to complete that assignment. I walked over to the Sleepeck room and met Linda Stanley, who turned out to be one of the most fascinating and enthusiastic people I've ever encountered...

DARREL L. BOATZ: *I'm speaking with Linda Stanley of Sleepeck Printing. How does one become a printer?*

LINDA STANLEY: Oh, probably by accident. *(Laughter.)* Before I was selling printing to small publishers I was a high school teacher and I was a singer in a rock&roll band. But I was interested in advertising and promotion, and a printing company gives you the opportunity to go all over and see everything at agencies, advertising companies, promotion companies and publishers. It's a nice position to be in, so that's why I *stay* in printing. How I got into printing was just by finding a job in Chicago seven years ago, and this seemed like a real good one.

DARREL: *You had no inclination in that direction prior to the job becoming open and you applying for it?*

LINDA: Well, I like to write and have an undergraduate degree in creative writing, so anything in the publishing field was going to be interesting to me. And publishers can't function without printers — at least they can't make money functioning without printers — so the printing field is sort of a natural.

DARREL: *Printing, it almost seems like a magical thing happens suddenly there are these books where before there was just all these pages and things. I don't think a lot of people out in the rest of the world understand what it is a printer does exactly — they may have a vague idea — so what is it exactly that a printer does?*

LINDA: Well, you mentioned the magic of it and that's certainly true. When we take people through our web printing facility and they realize that their book is printing in the four different colors, on a four-color book for instance, and each of the color cylinders are ten feet apart and the paper is going in on one end and about half a football field away the book is coming out of the other end of the press, it does seem like magic. The presses fold the paper and cut it and trim it and when it comes off it's almost a finished book. It still has to be stitched together but it's all folded up! I mean it's amazing, it's printed and folded. But that's the end product. What's happened before the actual printing takes place is also our venue, and that's the filmmaking; rendering from the fine art boards and artwork that we're given to work from, and producing film to actually be able to print from. That's much more complicated and it's done out of sight in rooms with red lights. What happens with our customers in general is that they very quickly come to see the reality of how their work is going to be transferred onto paper, and it becomes old hat after a few times.

DARREL: *You use photographic plates.*

LINDA: Yes.

DARREL: *Somebody takes a picture of the page and then that's put on a metal plate or plastic or whatever?*

LINDA: Well, metal plates are used to print, entirely. There's been different kinds of experimentation, Flexographic and other kinds of things that have really not proved very successful in the marketplace because the quality is not good. So a heat-set web offset press, which is what we print comic books with, is a press that runs with full metal plates After the paper's printed it even goes through a drying oven and is dried in a long ribbon, and then it's cut up into forms at the end of the press. It's high quality technology, the same technology that 's used in advertising and promotional printing. We're very likely to run a job for Buick or Oldsmobile after we run comic books. We aren't going to change anything between the two.

DARREL: *You get done with one job and*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Linda Stanley
Born: Effingham, IL, at the end of the Big War
Occupation: Printing Sales
Credits: Print for Comico, Fantagraphics, Renegade, Tru-Studios, Hero Comics, Fantagor Press, Genesis West, 3-D Zone, Kitchen Sink, Slave Labor Graphics, and many others
Training/Education: Liberal Arts degree in Music, Singer in a Rock & Roll Band, High School Teacher, and for eight years printing in Chicago
Favorite Things: GNATRAT; DARERAT/TADPOLE, Summer in Chicago; helping to make small publishers successful by designing printing that is affordable

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comics **48** *interview*

"So yes, there's lots of choices available."

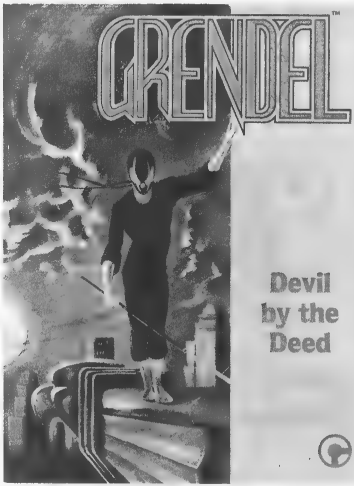
you just set the next one up.

LINDA: Exactly.

DARREL: *Is there anything special about the printing of comic books that would be different than say printing an ad for Buick or a newspaper or what have you?*

LINDA: Yes. When people call me they are surprised to find that they have choices. They have the choice of two or three weights of cover paper, they have a choice of three body stocks on regular comics, and the differing grades of paper that we offer are different in *brightness* factor. We offer a paper called Dixon #101, which is our least expensive body stock for comic books. It's very competitively priced. We have *extremely* good prices for small short runs of full-color comic books, that's what we're known for. And then we have a paper called Britewight, which is a very bright white paper just as its name implies, and that paper is liked by certain people who feel that their artwork has a lot of whiteness and brightness in it and they want that to show through and they'll pay a half-cent more with that paper. And there are others, such as Comico, who feel that much of the work they do is of such high artistic quality that they want a very fine quality paper on their normal comic book stock, and that paper is Baxter. It has not only a high brightness factor, but that paper has a slight amount of coating and sizing on it which gives you a nice surface to print on, which makes it even less like a newsprint Baxter is the top quality paper that we use for regular comics

So yes, there's lots of choices available for comic books. We have sort of made the choices ahead of times for customers because when they come to print with Sleepeck Printing Company we will have that material on the floor and ready to go and they'll have their choice of quality that they wish to buy. In graphic novels you have a choice of the weight of the cover that you're going to run. The ROBOTECH, GINGER FOX, and the GRENDEL graphic novels that we printed all have ten-point covers, and they have squarebound, otherwise known as perfect-bound, binding.



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Grendel (Graphic Novel) cover by Matt Wagner. "The graphic novels that we print have ten-point covers and perfect-bound binding."

The bodies of the books are exceptionally heavy and very beautiful matte stock, (paper) which is 80-pound. It's very beautiful paper, the kind of paper that we use for annual report printing. Does that answer your question?

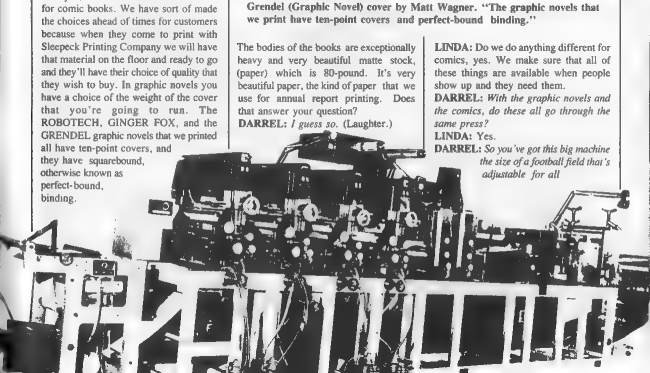
DARREL: *I guess so.* (Laughter.)

LINDA: Do we do anything different for comics, yes. We make sure that all of these things are available when people show up and they need them.

DARREL: *With the graphic novels and the comics, do these all go through the same press?*

LINDA: Yes.

DARREL: *So you've got this big machine the size of a football field that's adjustable for all*



"He (Zone) had noticed that the 3-D products

of these various items.

LINDA: That's right, various widths of paper. The cutoff on our presses is 22 3/4 inches, and that means that the maximum top to bottom size will be that. The width can vary. Comic book bodies are printed on 28 inch wide stock. A poster or a cover may use the full width of the press, which would be 38 inches on others. We have seven presses in all.

DARREL: *So you can even do specialty items.*

LINDA: Yes. In this room today — we're at a convention with a lot of major publishers — but the room we have here today is a room that Sleepeck has sponsored for the independent publishers, basically people who were not really able to get into the main room because that room closed off six months ago. So we purchased this room and made it available to all of the independent publishers who wished to come and display here, free of charge. These publishers need promotional materials, so in the room today you see a lot of free posters that are going out to customers, and these are printed on web presses and they are very very good values. Now, 10,000 posters may run in price from 8c to 15c a piece — that's just a real good buy — so people call us from all over the country for those kinds of things, and these become collectors' items themselves.

DARREL: *Well, you've spoken a few times about a half-cent here and so on, which —*

LINDA: Yes, we're a business of half-cents, definitely, because the half-cent will be multiplied by 10,000 comics, which means you've made a $50.00 decision.

DARREL: *That's a $50.00 for every half-cent you will spend of 10,000 comics.*

LINDA: Yes. *(Linda answers questions for conventioneers.)*

DARREL: *You were speaking about the PRINCE VALIANT giveaway you're running.*

LINDA: Manuscript Press, **Rick Norwood,** has given us today a $100.00 value item, which is a giant oversized copy of PRINCE VALIANT, and we're raffling it off at the convention today.

DARREL: *And it's a very nice item, I might add.*

LINDA: Many of the people here today are doing promotions. **Ray Zone** of 3-D Zone is going to be giving away a set of five of his 3-D books. We really enjoy it when the little kids come in and pick up the scratch and sniff 3-D glasses and enjoy 3-D for the first time, many of them. That's been fun.

DARREL: *And you do print 3-D?*

LINDA: Yes, we print 3-D. As a matter of fact Ray came from California, I picked him up at O'Hare, and he came to our printing plant and stayed for two days. Ray is a master of 3-D. We worded with various formulations of ink to get a consistent and optimum 3-D product. He had noticed that the 3-D products all over the country were looking good sometimes and poor other times. Basically we worked with many many formulations of ink and gave Ray his choice, to make the 3-D effects work to the max, and we now have what *he* says are among the finest 3-D books in the world.

Prince Valiant with his creator...

DARREL: *Hm, I may have to take a look at some of that.*

LINDA: He's interested in perfecting 3-D because of the kinds of material he's do-

Detail from the triple-page (foldout) that Linda spoke of...

© 1986 Matt Wagner

all over the country were good. . . sometimes."

. . . all by that same creator: Hal Foster.

ing. He just finished doing KRAZY KAT in 3-D, and of course when you're working with that kind of important, historical, and rich material then you just want to do it right. And he'll soon have HOLLYWOOD 3-D out, with **Marilyn Monroe** in it, so I look forward to that. It's been a wonderful association. So look for Ray's books.

DARREL: *Okay. 3-D, and you mentioned Flexographic earlier —*

LINDA: Yes. That's not a technology that we have. But when we're talking about technology we're talking about how people do things in different ways, and people do experiment. I guess what I was saying was the the experimentation ended very quickly. What happens right now is if you want a good quality direct-sale comic to sell for $1.50 or $2.50 or more — like in the case of the MAGE SPECIAL which had a foldout in the middle and a 100-pound cover — if you want a nice, good looking product then you just don't use cheap technologies. You simply use the finest technology you have. I don't expect much experimentation. People like **Matt Wagner** don't want to be rendered in something less than optimum once they get to press. Does that explain my position on experimentation? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *But don't you feel it's important for some experimentation to be going on?*

LINDA: Oh, I guess it will happen. Our machines are way out ahead of everybody else, so it's going to be hard to find anything better right now. Are you aware of anything? I'm not.

DARREL: *Well, let's go back to the magic a little bit. You put these blank rolls of paper on one end of the machine.*

LINDA: Yes, pure white, rolling off a roll that's so large that no one can lift it. Only a machine can lift it from here to there.

DARREL: *And out the other end come the folded up pages.*

LINDA: A little folded up piece of comic book body.

DARREL: *What goes on between the big roll of pristine white paper and the folded up pages coming out the other end?*

LINDA: Oh boy — well, I won't give you a technical description because I think I'd have to have illustrations and all kinds of things to do it right, and I don't know that there would be much interest in it. But suffice to say that in four-color printing — in fact that's a good description — four different inks are going to be put down on the paper. You have black, that would be half of your comic, and of course most people eliminate color from their word balloons and captions so that black is the only thing that is in their type, so black is an important element that we print with. Then we have the three process colors, which are variously called cyan which is blue, magenta which is red, and yellow which is yellow. *(Laughter.)* It takes all three of those plus black to give you a lifelike rendering of what you've done.

Those dots, one printing upon the other, fool the eye into blending those different color together, almost as if you were looking at a **Seurat** painting at the Art Institute here in Chicago. You would stand back from "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of Grand Jatte" and he has his pointilistic bits of paint up there and then your eye as you look at that blends together all of those little dots of color and you finally see the people in their big hats and long dresses

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"Darker purple would have dots of black."

standing and looking out over the river. Well, we do it with just smaller dots of ink on paper, very tiny. We sometimes actually look at those dots through a magnifying glass to check things like registration and how those dots are working one to the other to give us that clear final four-color image. I guess it's magic but it's basically what the eye gives us when it sees all of those four color dots together.

DARREL: *In other words it's some sort of optical illusion.*

LINDA: A slight optical illusion. I say it's slight because we actually have men who without the glass have acute eyesight and training who can actually look at a lot of printing and see the fine qualities of those dots. They are very attuned to looking for the dot of blue, the dot of yellow, the dot of red, the dot of black, and checking things like registration and the overall fit of the piece — just by looking at it. But you and I would certainly look at something like this *(holds up LAST OF THE VIKING HEROES #2, front cover)* and we would say we don't see it. I don't see the four individual colors that made that. I don't see every little bit of ink that made that up. What makes purple? Purple is dots of red and dots of blue, and to make this darker shade of purple it would also have dots of black. So all three of those dots are there, and the eye sees purple. I'm not counting the dots, are you? *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *I don't think I want to* count *the dots.*

LINDA: Well, they're all there. And at some point in the press when that 's printing *only* the yellow is there, then only the blue —

DARREL: *It will go through a section of the press where the yellow is printed by itself, and then later on down the line comes blue and red.*

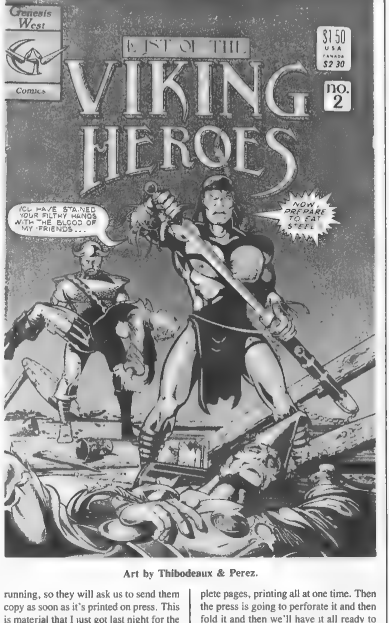
LINDA: Yes, exactly.

DARREL: *The machine then trims the form and folds them and kicks them out.*

LINDA: That's right, and perforates them to let the air out when it's folding. It's folding so fast that it needs to let the air out fast so it puts little perforations in it and the air will escape through the holes.

DARREL: *Wow! I didn't know that. Those pages got holes in them to being with? (Laughter.)*

LINDA: Yes. It's all around the outer edge where we're going to trim it away — you won't see that in the final product — but we actually perforate the outside edges of these forms so that there will be a way for the air to escape. Our customers are from all over the country and they can't always stand by while the press is



Art by Thibodeaux & Perez.

running, so they will ask us to send them copy as soon as it's printed on press. This is material that I just got last night for the FISH POLICE SPECIAL from Comico. Kinda neat, huh? This is a section of it, and there's the perforations that I spoke of on the outer edge.

DARREL: *Wow.*

LINDA: And when it came through the press it was unfolded and it was this large.

DARREL: *Okay. I'm looking at eight comic-book pages that are all joined together, two by four.*

LINDA: Well, eight on one side and eight on the other.

DARREL: *Eight leafs, rather.*

LINDA: That's right, and sixteen complete pages, printing all at one time. Then the press is going to perforate it and then fold it and then we'll have it all ready to put together. *(Linda folds form, starting at two by four it becomes two by two, one by two, completely folded with page #1 on top.)*

DARREL: *Okay, so after it comes out of the press then what do you do?*

LINDA: Well, the machine actually stacks it up and we will have men at the end of the press not only inspecting it but stacking it up so that it can be taken over on a skid by the binding equipment, and then it's a fairly passe situation Two sections of the body and one section of the cover will be combined to the machine, one

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"A carload of paper makes 270,000 comic

falling right on top of the other through the machine, and then that goes on to the machine with the binding equipment which will stitch the book — staple it, which we call stitching — and then the machine will trim it. It's called a stitcher/trimmer machine. At that point the book is complete and it goes into cartons of 100 or 250 and is ready to go out the door the next day from the shipping department.

DARREL: *Or whoever comes to pick it up.*

LINDA: We know when we print who is going to come to get it. We plan that in advance. When we print the comics we know who has bought them already, and we know how many extras to print for the company.

DARREL: *And of course you know how much paper you are going to need before you even get the pages from the publisher.*

LINDA: We have a pretty good idea, but we get the best price if we buy a carload of paper. A carload of paper makes 270,000 comic books, so we tend to just keep buying paper. *(Laughter.)* That does away with any real necessity to know in advance. Someone can come to us tomorrow and we'll probably have paper waiting for them.

DARREL: *David Kraft, whom we both know, loves to tell horror stories.*

LINDA: Well, David's not printing with me so I'll listen to his horror stories. *(Laughter.)* I'm hoping David will someday.

DARREL: *This is your big chance to tell your horror stories.*

LINDA: Oh.

DARREL: *If you have any.*

LINDA: I'm trying to think about the most horrible situation we've had. Well, the biggest horror story for any publisher is to hear that their work isn't ready on time. We print a lot of comic books and 99.9 % of the time we are on time, but we have the normal thing that you hear from the printer — when it goes wrong for us it's the same as will happen for other printers — and that's when a press goes down. That sounds like it got shot and fell to its knees like an ailing horse or something. *(Laughter.)*

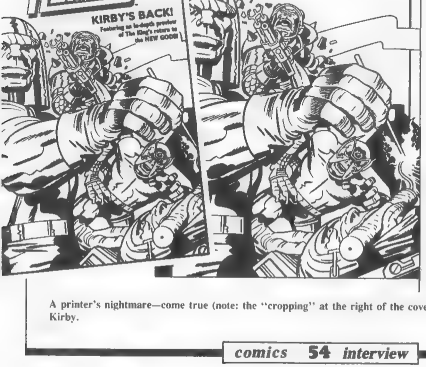
Sometimes customers will bring me material so close to deadline that it's almost physically impossible to do it, but we'll try our very best. For instance this convention was a good example — the last two weeks before this convention we had many projects that people brought in at the last minute without ever even telling us that they were coming, or not knowing for certain what they were going to have, and also many of them had called and said they were going to have their material in three or four weeks ago and in fact they were having a hard time getting the art and the inking and the color separations done in time to get it to us to print. We had a lot of people walking in a the last minute saying, "I know I'm late but I still want this for the convention!" *(Laughter.)*

We try to accommodate people as best as we can. By and large we do fine, but we do have cases where a press decides to die in the middle of printing — we had that happen on a poster which we had been working on. One of our sheet-fed presses had a major malfunction right before I was supposed to print this poster, and I had only 24 hours before the convention was supposed to start. The lucky part — it certainly is a horror story in the making — the fortunate part of it all is we were able to take the film and drive to our web printing plant — we have our sheet-fed division in one area and our web in another — and we were able to convert that film and print it on web presses instead. We actually had to take a customer that was running on a web press off — it wasn't a comic-book customer. *(Laughter.)* We had to take a regular commercial client off and put this job on and then run it, just so we could dash back here and be ready for the convention.

So, those are horror stories. They are horrific because it involves a lot of upset and confusion and possible errors. And it's also horror stories because you *still* might not make it. And they are horror stories because you're doing it sometimes in the middle of the night. We're a 24-hour operation so we may very well be solving problems at 2:00 A.M. or at 3:00 A.M. It gets to be kind of DOCTOR JECKEL AND MISTER HYDEish. I mean you do get tired staying awake for two or three days searching for solutions to problems, so tired that you can't feel your teeth — it's a very demanding business.

DARREL: *You obviously have a great interest in the comic-book industry. How do you feel your company, Sleepeck — that's a hard name for me to say somehow —*

LINDA: It is. It's the family name. Sleepeck is one of those names that you probably would not pick for a company, but when it's the family name and the company has been here in Chicago for 80



A printer's nightmare—come true (note: the "cropping" at the right of the cover art). Art by Jack "DYNAMITE" Kirby.

Characters © 1988 DC Comics, Inc./Amazing Heroes 1985 Fantagraphics Books

books, so we tend to just keep buying paper. . ."

years then they don't change it. *(Laughter.)* We're very respected here. We're about the fifth largest printer here in Chicago, and that includes R.R. Donnelly which is the world's largest printer. So we're a very large printer.

DARREL: *How do you feel Sleepeck has contributed to the current state of the comic-book industry?*

LINDA: Well, last year we contributed to the black-and-white glut and this year, in 1987 and '88, we are going to contribute to the *color* glut! *(Laughter.)* The glut of course being in existence because the wholesale and distribution market hasn't figured out where the customers are for these books. The customers *are* out there.

We contribute by making very affordable printing, and you might want to interview people that we work with to talk to them about why they choose to print with us. I think what you would hear — in addition to, I hope, useful things about the way I do business and the way Rebecca Bach does business; she's my daughter and she also sells printing for Sleepeck, and comic books is *all* that she prints — but I think you are going to hear that we're very affordable. We have combined those same elements I mentioned earlier of exactly the right kind of paper, exactly the right kind of cover stock , exactly the right kinds of presses, exactly the right combinations, and we have priced it so that small publishers can now print color. So that's our contribution, and people are just very surprised that they can do books economically and at the quality that we do.

Linda's daughter, Rebecca Bach.

Photo: Mark Baker

PRINTERS + PUBLISHERS = BOOKS

L *[illegible] and I finished speaking at this convention, started chatting for all of my problems, my mistakes. I need obscenely priced. But one thing I value above a good working relationship, people that I can talk to, discuss business but also just be human too. And people [illegible] what I am trying to do with it. I'll help give me the kind of look that I'm looking for. I work with the printer I was [illegible] and I've hopped around to a couple of printers but have gone back to these people. Pratt Publications because of the things I just talked about. They are giving me good service, good turnaround time, and we also have an established working relationship now. I can talk to them and they know what I'm talking about, they know what I want. And over the years we've been working together we've built up a real good relationship, a business relationship. In fact I was up there just the other day, the first time I've been working with these guys for about ten years and I'd never even seen the place until I drove up there yesterday.*

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT (Comics Interview): I need unbelievably fast turnaround. I specialize *only* in printers who use those Web presses that can print a month ago, and they're usually booked up. I need very good quality work and an understanding of what's important to our readers, which is that the books are in good shape. You know, a printer sometimes doesn't understand that you can't bundle it like a newspaper and throw it around. People's comics, they bag them, it's important to them — so you need a printer who understands how to pack them. They're not throw away items. Last but not least, certainly not least, we need the world's lowest prices. We currently use several printers depending on the project. We use R.R. Donnelly for, say, the SOLDIERS KNIGHTS graphic novels. We use Associated Printing for most of our black-and-white books. We use Pratt Publications to print COMICS INTERVIEW, have since the first issue. Then on special projects we'll use different printers where that makes economical sense.

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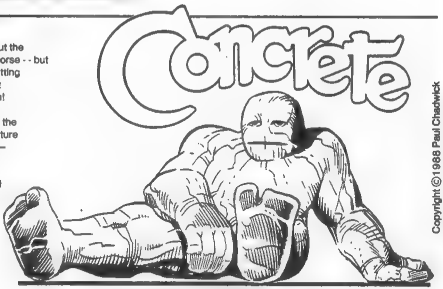

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LAST WORD

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PACIFIC WAS *NOT* THE FIRST

Dear Dave,

As always I enjoyed the diversity presented in COMICS INTERVIEW. In issue #55, I particularly enjoyed the interview with **Steve Schanes**. Despite some popular perceptions about Steve — due primarily to the demise of Pacific Comics — he is one of the most astute marketing people in our business.

There was a major point made in the course of the interview with Steve, however, that needs correcting. Steve claims that Pacific was the "first company to offer the creators ownership of the characters they created." As you are very much aware, Dave, Pacific was not the first to offer creators ownership. Creator ownership has been Eclipse's policy since we opened our doors in 1978, long before Pacific started publishing comics. Prior to us, **Mike Friedrich** offered creator ownership with his Star*Reach company, **Wally Wood** and **Bill Pearson** offered the same with WITZEND, and on and on. There is a strong history of creator ownership before Pacific Comics ever entered the scene.

Further, Eclipse was (I believe) the first comics company to offer royalties on every copy sold. This too has been our policy from the start. The royalties enjoyed by creators in this industry can be traced to our work, and the Epic line has long been considered a reaction to Eclipse (even the name is derivative!).

Finally, I take exception to **Ron Underhill**'s misstatement that Pacific's offering creator ownership "allowed" companies like Eclipse to become "so strong, because they have adopted such things." I think you owe it to your readers, Dave, to set the record straight. In fact, in 1978 you yourself were present at Eclipse's birth and helped arrange the printing for SABRE, the first graphic novel produced in the direct market. That property and all other creations published by Eclipse since has been owned by the creators.

Dean Mullaney
Publisher
Eclipse Comics
Box 1099
Fovestville, CA 95436

STOLEN ART ALERT!

Dear folks —

Until recently the 300 pages of artwork I drew for 2000AD, the British science-fiction comic, have been retained by Fleetway (formerly IPC), the publishers of that comic. Much of this work has been reprinted in the USA in the Eagle or Quality JUDGE DREDD comics. Some time ago Fleetway agreed to return these pages to me. I was most surprised and distressed, therefore, to learn that many of these pages are already available for sale through dealers in America. As neither I nor Fleetway have authorised their release, I can only presume they have been stolen.

The remaining pages have now been returned to me and 115 have been found to be missing. The missing artwork — a list follows — consists of JUDGE DREDD story pages and 2000AD covers but does not include the covers of the Eagle JUDGE DREDD comics, some of which have been legitimately sold. All of the 300 pages have now been catalogued and the 185 that remain have been signed by me for purposes of identification and will be legitimately released for sale by Forbidden Planet in London.

I want to make it clear that, as I write this, all of my JUDGE DREDD artwork from 2000AD that is for sale or in the hands of anyone in the UK or USA, other than myself or Forbidden Planet, has been stolen. I would urge editors of fanzines or comic trade papers not to carry advertisements from dealers claiming to sell it. It is too late to stop the trade in this stolen artwork but I would ask anyone who has come into contact with it, or has any information as to its whereabouts, or channels through which it has passed to get in touch with me via the address below. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Brian Bolland
c/o Jon Harrison
Forbidden Planet
23 Denmark Street
London WC2H 8NA, England

N.B.:- Page number 1 indicates front cover. Page number 32 indicates back cover - usually a pin-up or one page 'Walter the Wobot' story. (W) indicates wraparound double cover. (Inc.) indicates a consecutive run- i.e. 17-20 (Inc.) means pages 17, 18, 19 and 20.

2000AD issue no.	Page nos.	2000AD issue no.	Page nos.
11	1	127	3-8(Inc.)
23	1	131	1
27	1	144	1-32(W)
47	16,17	146	1
50	16,17	149	3-7 (Inc.)
51	16,17	150	3-7 (Inc.)
52	16,17,32	151	3-7 (Inc.)
53	32	161	1
54	32	166	14
55	32	172	1
56	32	182	1
57	16, 17, 32	210	1
58	32	213	32
59	32	216	1
60	32	224	1,16,17
61	32	225	1,16,17
67	15,32	226	16, 17
77	1, 17-22(Inc.)	227	16, 17
78	17-22(Inc.)	228	16, 17
83	32	236	1-32(W)
107	1, 32	240	1
118	32	244	7, 8
119	32		
121	1		

Full colour painted material: -
Cover - Judge Dredd Annual 1981
Cover - Starlord Annual 1981
Cover - 2000AD Annual 1981 plus interior pages 57-64(Inc.)
Cover - 2000AD Summer Special 1982
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